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Sree Narayana Guru

THE GOLDEN DAWN

It is no exaggeration to say that latter half of the nineteenth century heralded the dawn of a golden era in the history of India. For, never before or since then had there been the advent of so many great men in such a short time as during those decades. It was truly like the coming of spring, the season of regeneration, joy and hope, in the withered garden of India, filling the land with fine and fragrant flowers. And a flower of the finest fragrance was Sree Narayana Guru, who was born on an auspicious day in September 1854.

The birth of a great soul is not just a fortuitous occurrence. Great personages are born in response to the urges of the times and are therefore a historical necessity. If then, at any particular period of time, several such superman were to pace our troubled earth, it could only be due to the compulsions of extra-ordinary circumstances.

Now what was so unusual in nineteenth century India? It is essential to know the true background of this period for us to understand the significance of the life and work of the great men of the time. A similar study of the time is essential also for the proper appreciation of the life of the illustrious Sree Narayana Gurudeva.

For India, eighteenth century was the Dark Age at its densest. Degeneracy had set in with virulence in national life at all levels. It appeared as though the country had no worthy goal to march forward. Nor was there any lofty ideal inspiring the people to endeavors. Surely, a worse plight there could hardly be.

For a hundred years from the middle of the eighteenth century, the culture and civilization of our land had been sinking steadily till they touched their lowest depth. During this dark period, there was not much of creative activity, no new work that could be called a literary masterpiece in any of the Indian languages. Hinduism was in a moribund state. The indigenous arts that had survived centuries of inestimable value disappeared owing to the ignorance and indifference of the people, were plundered and shipped off by the avaricious foreigners to their lands. The tidal wave of a totally alien civilization arrested all the creative impulses of the natives. Western influence cast such a spell on the educated youth anything Indian began to be looked down upon by them. Perhaps for the first time in her long history, India seemed to have lost her sanity and sense of values. Not even the waves of Muslim conquest had brought about such a sad transformation. Hindu Dharma then had held its own, with singular firmness and equanimity. During the five centuries between 1200 and 1750 A.D. when India was under the heels of the Turks and the Moghuls, she had maintained her growth in all spheres of national activity.

The victory that the British won on the battlefield of Plassey was the prelude to a more significant and far-reaching one, namely, the cultural conquest of India. To begin with, several schools under the auspices of foreign missionaries were started. A new world of ideas and ideals, disseminated through these schools, rose on the mental horizon of the young and growing generation. No doubt, Western culture contained many things which were not only

admirable but also desirable. But the pity of it was that side by side with the spread of English ideas by the earliest Christian missionaries, a sustained attack on Hinduism and Hindu society was also kept up. Their interest was not confined to the spread of education. Nor were they educationists in the true sense of the term. They were intolerant, bigoted preachers who never lost an opportunity to denigrate and ridicule our socio-religious institutions. No doubt, their professed aim in opening schools and colleges was the dissemination of secular, scientific knowledge. But what they did in effect was the propagation of Christianity as the only true religion of the world. No wonder that many of those who came out of the portals of those missionary schools and colleges became “the sworn enemies of every Hindu”, “If there is anything that we hate from the bottom of our heart”, wrote a student in 1831 in “The Mirror”, “it is Hinduism and the Hindu way of life”. This by and large reflected the attitude of the educated Indian youth of the eighteenth century.

This was not all. The youth of Bengal took to beef-eating and drinking with a vengeance. The feeling was rampant among college students of the eighteen forties that drunkenness was an essential concomitant of civilization. They began a revolt against all traditional beliefs, conduct and behavior and glorified everything Western.

This trend, however, did not last long. On the contrary, it only helped to awaken the Hindu spirit from its sound sleep. As the young generation began to gravitate towards Christianity as a result of Western education, not only the orthodox section of the people but even some of the progressives who had championed the cause of English education began to feel that it was their duty to face the new challenge and beat it back.

What was the reaction of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore who was never opposed to English education? He found that the Christian missionaries were not only reviling the Hindu spirit and the Hindu social order, but were also converting the youths into Christianity. Naturally enough, the students of the schools run by them were their first victims. This agitated and saddened the Maharshi who decided to do his utmost to check this onslaught on the Hindu way of life. He started the movement of boycotting the Christian missionary schools by the Hindus. They refused to send their children there. “The innate vitality of that religion with its great and glorious past asserted itself. At first, the reviewed faith was on its defence, rather cautious and timid in maintaining its position and inclined to compromise with the enemy. But soon it took the offensive, marched forward, even entered the hostile camp and asserted in ringing tones its right to live as one of the civilizing influences of mankind.”

“As luck would have it, as this critical moment and against the background designed by history, the ‘Spirit of India’ brought to the forefront a number of great souls who had absorbed the vitality of this renaissance. Each one of them, on his own peculiar way, gave an impetus to the several national movements suffused with the genius of Indian nationalism. At the early stages, it made the people aware of their limitations. In course of time, however, it created among the people the consciousness that they were an ancient nation with a glorious past. It made them feel proud of a great culture profoundly rooted in the past.”

“As a result partly of these external forces but largely of the inherent vitality of our own long spiritual tradition, there arose in the period a number of reformers, teachers, saints and

scholars who have purified Hinduism by denouncing some of its accretions, separated its essentials from its nonessentials, confirmed its ancient truths by their own experience and have even carried its message to Europe and America.”

It was on Bengal's horizon that this renaissance had its golden dawn. As Maharshi Aurobindo says, “It was Bengal that the Spirit of India had chosen early enough as its workshop. It created, without stint, new forces and innumerable epoch-making individuals who were also harbingers of a new dawn. Bengal had everything essential for the creation of a new society that was in the mould. A firm will –power born out of energy-worship and the practice of rituals over a long period had become an integral part of Bengal for some considerable Time.” Thus Bengal naturally became the centre of the national renaissance and the progressive movements that had their origin here spread to other parts of the country.

The number of great men born in India during this period was a phenomenon in itself. They spread a new light and energy in all spheres of life. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Devendranath Tagore, Sree Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Maharshi Aurobindo, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Abanindranath Bose and other illustrious personalities in Bengal; Lokmanya Tilak, Mahadeva Govinda Ranade, Gopalakrishna Gokhale, Veer Savarkar and Dr. Ambedkar in Maharashtra, Mahatma Gandhi and Parmanand in the Punjab, Ramana Maharshi, Chelambaranathan Pillai and Subrahmanya Bharathi in Tamilnadu-these great sons of India born in the Nineteenth century brought about the great awakening of Mother India from the darkness of ages. In the far south, the harbingers of the light were Chattampi Swamikal and Sree Narayana Gurudeva.

The spirit of Indian culture threatened with destruction by the invasion of Western moves and ideas, once again asserted itself, as it had done so often in the past in its encounters with alien challengers, through a new expression of its essential genius and unique grandeur. As it happened, it was a galaxy of saints who first set in motion the process of this self-assertion Sree Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the north east, Swami Dayanand in the north-west and Sree Narayana Guru in the remote South.

KERALA – THE LUNATIC ASYLUM

These harbingers of India's national renaissance, enumerated in the preceding Chapter, were the embodiments of the eternal Spirit of India as well as the offspring of the nineteenth century time-spirit. Yet, each one of them had an individuality that was distinctive. The peculiarities of the place and community in which they were born as also the circumstances of their upbringing determined their individuality as well as the mode and nature of their work. Consequently, for the proper appreciation of their life, for the correct assessment of their mission in life, one has to know their historical background and the social and cultural environment in which they were born.

It was in Nineteenth Century Kerala that the subject of our study, Sree Narayana Gurudeva, was born. Again, it was in Kerala and its immediate neighbourhood that he lived and worked till the end of his life. What was the social set-up of Kerala like in those days? We get the most graphic picture of the social life of 19th century Kerala from the words of Swami Vivekananda: "Was there ever a sillier thing before in the world than what I saw in Malabar country. The poor Parajah is not allowed to pass through the same street as the high-caste man, it is all right; or to a Mohammedan name, it is all right. What inference would you draw except that these Malabris are all lunatics, their homes so many lunatic asylums, and that they are to be treated with derision by every race in India until they mend their manners and know better. Shame upon them that such wicked and diabolical customs are allowed; their own children are allowed to die of starvation, but as soon as they take up some other religion they are well fed. There ought to be no more fight between the castes."

In short, the social inequities and injustices in Kerala then were such that they provoked even the detached and unprejudiced Swamiji to describe Kerala as a vast lunatic asylum. At the apex of the caste-pyramid stood the Brahmins and at the base, the untouchables like the Paraiyahs and Pulayas. The middle order was made up of the Nayers who were Shudras but Savarnas. The Ezhavas were low on the caste scale, classified among the Avarnas, but for above the lowest Paraiyahs and Pulayas and other Harijans of Kerala.

The Nayers and the Ezhavas, who had once lived in amity and friendship for ages without much thought of 'high' or 'low', had drifted far apart by now. The Nayers, coming closer to the Brahmins, occupied the higher echelons of the caste-hierarchy. And the Ezhavas slipped down correspondingly lower. The Ezhavas derived satisfaction in treating their inferior Paraiyahs and Pulayas with greater contempt than they received at the hands of Brahmins and Nayers; but they showed even greater eagerness in keeping the Pulayas at a distance of one hundred feet. A worse irony was that any caste survey could reveal the existence of innumerable sub-sects among the Ezhavas themselves for whom community-eating was a taboo."

This consideration of 'high' and 'low' had percolated to all the aspects of life. The low castes were denied admittance to the temples of the high castes. They were not allowed to approach even the periphery of these temples. They had the freedom to build temples of their own, if they so chose. But under no circumstances could they install in their temples the same deities worshipped in the temples of the high castes. In most cases, their deity was Goddess Chamundi who was worshipped with the offerings of toddy and the blood of fowls and animals.

The discrimination was severe in the case of schools too. There were no schools in which the 'high' and the 'low' caste students could sit together and learn. And those run by the Government were barred to the Ezhavas and other 'low' castes. Nor was it easy for them to get into Government service even after they had managed to secure education at high cost.

T.K. Madhavan, in his biography of Dr. Palpu, gives an excellent account of the plight of the Ezhava community during the childhood days of Sree Narayana Gurudeva. "They were denied access to the Government schools; nor were jobs available to the educated among them. They could not use all the through fares open to others of the 'high' caste. They were not admitted inside the Government offices. They must stand afar even when they had gone to the

village munsiff's office to pay taxes. Temples were barred to them; they must stand a furlong outside the temple walls. When true worship of God was made impossible for them, their mode of worship itself began to deteriorate. There was a growing tendency to worship ghosts and ghouls. Proper medical treatment went out of use, instead, spells, conjuration, exorcism etc. began to be used as the cure for ailments. Superstitions and antiquated customs took deep roots. Unnecessary social ceremonies and celebrations such as the occasion when a girl in the family reaches puberty, when she is to have a customary first marriage at an absurdly tender age and the one associated with the ninth month of her pregnancy, landed the families in financial bankruptcy. Marital and family ties began steadily to weaken. Polygamy and Polyandry were the order of the day. This was the social condition into which Sree Narayana Guru and Dr. Palpu were born, the social scene on which they opened their eyes".

This segregation and untouchability were practiced against the 'low' caste Hindu alone. It might seem strange that this was the cruel treatment meted out to the Ezhavas in those days even by the Mohammedans who used to declare their casteless ness from the house-tops. T.K. Madhavan narrates a significant episode in his own life: "An incident which took place in my life while I was at Kayamkulam for my studies has left an indelible impression on my mind. The entire market of Kayamkulam on the eastern side was the property of my father's family. On a monsoon evening, wearing my wooden sandals, I walked up from the eastern bridge at Kayamkulam along the road leading to the market on the eastern side. Hardly had I walked a few yards westward when half a dozen Mohammedans surrounded me, shouting menacingly, "Get down, you fellow, their threatening posture and my helplessness at that time, as also the humiliation which might befall me in case the incident became known, compelled me to get off the sandals instantly. I made good my escape from that place, carrying the sandals in my hand. It struck me as a significant event that I was not allowed to walk on my sandals in a quarter owned by my father. What made it more significant was the fact that I was forced to do so under compulsion not from the caste Hindus but from the Mohammedans who believed in no caste whatever".

It was an era when Hindu society was in utter disorder due to evil practices like untouchability, contempt and distrust among the different castes for one another. Exploiting this situation to their own advantage, the foreign Christian missionaries spread their work throughout Kerala. The native princes of Travancore and Cochin were compelled to extend patronage to the programme of proselytisation initiated by the foreign missionaries. The ground for Christian missionary propaganda was prepared by the British Residents in these native states, using their official influence as the representatives of the British Crown.

What was the outcome of it all, " It was in Travancore ruled over by Orthodox Hindu Princes compared to Hyderabad ruled by Mohammedan sultans that the percentage of the Hindus was found smaller- 69% in Travancore as against 89% in Hyderabad. The reason is not far to seek. The inter caste and communal cleavages here were clearly sharper. The great wall that divided one caste from another was too strong to be broken down. Therefore, the lower-caste Hindus found out that they had nothing to lose if they were to renounce their position in Hindu society, was much to gain, for, to continue in the religion of their birth meant an extension of their depressed state of life. It was no wonder therefore that the lower-caste Hindus began to

develop that approached them with the message of deliverance from the shackles of the old religion.”

It goes without saying that this programme of Christian Proselytisation weakened the Hindus in the same measure as it strengthened the Christian community in Kerala.

“It could be seen clearly from the census figures for the period between 1816 and 1891 that the Hindu not only failed to keep growing at the rate at which the Christian population increased, but that it registered a definite decline. The Hindus who constituted 82.7 % of the population during the early part of the 19th century sharply fell to 73.18%. In other words, when the Hindu population declined by 9.6% during 75 years, the Christian population during the same period steeply rose by 8.2% which showed that Christianity absorbed those who had renounced Hinduism. This also makes clear that the Hindu was gradually renouncing their Dharma and that most of them were embracing Christianity.

Again, when we consider the number of Hindu temples and other places of worship in the past, and compare it with those at present, the trend towards extinction is unmistakable. In 1816, there were 195442 Hindu temples. Among them 3662 belonged to Caste Hindus and 15862 to non-Caste Hindus, which were not included in the number given above, for reasons not known. Thus, in the year 1816, there were a total of 21958 Hindu temples.

According to the census of 1891, total number of Hindu temples was only 9364. Among them, 6151 were temples where higher Gods were worshipped and 3205 where lower Gods were worshipped. Thus, it is evident that this shocking decline in the number related to temples belonging to lower Caste Hindus. The conclusion to be drawn from these statistics is that it was among the depressed classes that Christianity laid its proselytizing hands. History teaches us that this was the case whenever Christianity spread. Christian Missionaries usually start with converting the low, the depressed and outcastes.

In the annals Missionary activity, one can easily discern innumerable instances of wanton destruction of temples-especially those belonging to the lower castes. So intense was this fanaticism.

Apart from the usual proselytising activities and the normal increase in population, a good deal of mass conversions were also resorted to by the Christian Missionaries, which accounts for the rapid rise in Christian population. Famines and social oppressions were taken advantage of to convert the Hindus in large numbers to Christianity. Even though it was worldly inducements which attracted them to Christianity in the beginning, later on, they continued to profess, faith in Christianity.”

The same book gives a detailed account of how about 4000 persons were induced by the Christian missionaries to embrace Christianity at the time of the 1860 famine. They not only gave up their Mother faith, but also destroyed with their own hands the very temples they used to worship in till that time.

On one side unbearable social disabilities, and humiliating treatment which challenged not only their self-respect but also their very humanity-on other hand the tempting promises and

allurements held out by foreign missionaries who had the backing of both the native princes as also of the British Imperialism-Naturally Hindus,-especially those belonging to the depressed sections-were mentally adjusting themselves to mass conversion to Christianity or other alien faiths. It was at such a point of time that Sree Narayana Guru was born.

CHATHAYAM – THE AUSPICIOUS DAY

The little hamlet of Chempazhanthi is situated about ten miles north-east of the city of Trivandrum. It derived its name, in all probability, from the House of Chempazhanthi, one of the collateral branches of the famous family of the “Ettuveettu Pillais” that had played a dominant role in the history of Travancore. Our hero who came to have a great influence on the future of Kerala was born in this village-a place which still remains largely untouched by urban civilization.

Chempazhanthi is blessed with an extensive stretch of green paddy fields. On the southern edge, a tiny thatched house surrounded by a cluster of coconut trees standing like tall sentinels can still be seen. The house is called “Vayalvaram” meaning ‘Field’s End’, probably because of its location at the end of the paddy fields. At the entrance, a few wooden bars and a small door; inside three ill-ventilated rooms, dark and small-this is ‘Field’s End’, as we see it today.

There is a thicket (Bower) on the eastern side of the plot on which the house stands and a little further east to the thicket is a temple in which the Mother Goddess is worshipped. The temple is jointly owned by the Nayars and Ezhavas of the locality. The age-old practice was to plan the celebration of the festivals and conduct the temple affairs by the elders belonging to these communities sitting on the grass beds in front of the temple. The ezhavas used to conduct the worship at the temple. The fact that the Ezhavas were the priests at a temple belonging also to the Nayars, and that the two communities joined hands to look after the temple was one striking instance of the fraternal ties between the two communities, distinct as they were in point of caste. This unity must have been the relic of the glorious past before the divisive influence came into play. The family of ‘Field’s End’ was widely respected. Its members were traditionally well read and of sterling character. For generations, they were learned in such subjects as literature, medicine, astrology etc.

Kochaan Aasaan was an elderly member of this family. He was not only noble-minded, but also gifted in deciphering and transcribing the ancient writing preserved in palm leaves. For this reason, he was called Kochaan Aasaan meaning the learned. It is said that several of his writings in palm leaves are still extant in Trivandrum and its neighborhood. Shri Narayana Guru had a striking resemblance to Kochaan Aasaan passed away in his seventy-second year, two years before the birth of Sree Narayana. It is said that it was he who performed the installation ceremony at the Manakkal Temple.

Kochaan Asian's sister, 'Kutty', was married to kochuvilayil Maatan Aasaan. To this ideal couple-Maatan Aasaan, a scholar in Sankrit, medicine and astrology and a great devotee of Lord Shiva, utterly indifferent to fame, and kutty, simple, dignified and beautiful- was born Sree Aryan, the only male child of the family, under the \auspicious star, cathead in the month of chingam in 1030 malayalam era. It is the time after harvest when the people of Kerala celebrated onam, the auspicious festival of the land, Of the land, with gaiety and joy.

Of Sree Narayana's parents, Nataraja Guru observes:-“ An agricultural family lived in this countryside about the year 1885. The father, Madan Aasaan, was more than a mere farmer. He was well versed in astronomy and Ayurvedic medicine, and was a teacher too, as his name Aasaan indicates. He was respected by his fellow- villagers and he guided them in matters of agriculture, land surveying, revenue, and so on. He walked into the temple City of Trivandrum to pay his taxes, dressed into two pieces of white cloth and carrying a simple palm-leaf umbrella, the type being used even today by villagers in these rural parts. Once a week the villagers assembled in the verandah of his house to hear him expound the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, the two ancient epics of India.

The simple and pleasant young wife of Maatan Aasaan, the mother of Nanu, was a sensitive and pretty woman known as Kutty. This name, which means “child”, fitted the basic simplicity of her nature and social status. She just happened to be there, as if by nature's own design. She had no titles, sophistication, nor any extra embellishments of dress or ornament to mark her out as a woman above the ordinary. She had only her natural grace and kindles, which the son inherited. The homespun wisdom of the Guru Narayana has to be acknowledged as drawn from this simple woman who gave him birth and who, in her quiet ways, seemed to merge into the background of nature itself-so self effacing was his mother.

“It is common knowledge that the new-born and must cry at birth. But this infant did nothing of the kind.

Those around, naturally, were alarmed, and waited eagerly for the child to cry. However, it did not. Its strange silence might have been in keeping with the restraint and reticence which was a notable characteristic of Sree Narayana Guru in later years.

The child was named 'Narayana', but was called 'Nanu' for short. About his childhood days, Kumaran Aasaan(in the magazine, 'Vivakayam' of Medam 1090.M.E), observers:” As a boy, the Swami was not very gentle. On the contrary, he was quite mischievous in certain respects. The boy showed an unusual delight in eating the fruits and other preparations even before they were offered to God, saying that God would be pleased if he were pleased, and would outwit those who tried to prevent him from doing the mischief. Another delightful pastime of his was to touch the untouchable boys of his age standing at a distance and then run back home to touch the womenfolk working in the kitchen as well as those who practiced untouchability too fastidiously”.

Narayana was interested both in boyish pranks and in serious physical exercise. His body was learn, supple and flexible. Like Sree Krishna, the divine Cowherd, Narayana along with his rustic friends used to graze the cattle. He was credited with uncommon skill of felling

ripe mangoes from the topmost branch of the tree standing on the nearby hillock with just one fling of the stone.

Narayana's childhood mischiefs were also reminiscent of those of Narendra who became known in later years as Swami Vivekananda. The two resembled each other not merely in mischief, but in several other respects. For example, their love and reverence for mendicants and monks. Narendra felt no small joy in giving away even costly things as gifts to the wandering monks. This attitude of reverence to monks shown by Narayana foreshadowed their future life as wandering monks. One incident in Narayana's boyhood days stands out as an excellent illustration of his reverential attitude towards monks: "One day during his school-days, the Swami (then boy Narayana) was returning from school with his classmates. On the way, they met a monk, and some of them, struck with the queer and novel mode of his dress, pelted him with stones. Narayana, however, could not stand this cruelty. Perhaps owing to his inability to prevent it or to take the boys to task, he burst into tears. Seeing the boy weeping, the monk not only consoled him with kind words but even took the boy home on his shoulders."

Even during boyhood, the tendencies inhering to a monk's life such as discrimination and detachment were found latent in Narayana along with his love of laughter and merriment. While he was six, someone died in his house and there was the usual weeping and wailing followed by the ceremony of cremation. Afterwards, life in that house continued as before as if nothing very unusual had ever happened there. But Narayana was nowhere to be found. At length, a Pulaya farm-hand, working in the fields came running to report that 'the boy of the house' was there in the nearby thicket, remaining alone. Then the boy was brought back to the house from the thorny thicket where he was seen lost in thought. Asked why he had gone there, the boy answered: "You were loudly lamenting the death in the house the day before yesterday. But by yesterday, you had forgotten it and had begun to laugh and joke. And it was this that made me run away to the thicket."

This reminds one of saint Ramadas's answers to his mother. Finding her son keeping himself aloof from the other boys, the mother asked him: "My boy, why don't you join the others in their games," "I was contemplating on the ways of the world, mother", was his precocious answer.

NANU – THE DEVOTEE

Narayana was formally initiated into the three R's by a teacher at Chempazhanthi under those supervision, the boy went through the preliminary processes of education. By virtue of his incisive intellect and retentive memory, Narayana mastered the art of reading and writing with surprising ease.

After he had acquired the skill of reading Malayalam fluently, he began, according to the traditional system of education, the study of the Sanskrit works on Grammar and Linguistics like

Siddharoopam, Bala Prabodham and Amarakosam. He was able to master these subjects in a very short time, thanks to his astonishing powers of comprehension and retention.

Narayana was well versed not only in Malayalam and Sanskrit but also in Tamil. It was but natural for him to develop a strong liking for Tamil since the language was very much current among the people of the area. He is believed to have mastered the language mainly by his own effort. A disciple of the Guru states:

“The Swamiji, during the days of his life as an itinerant monk, used to frequent a Tamil bookshop. In those days Chalai and its neighborhoods were inhabited mostly by the Tamilians, and the Pillais of Travancore who were the Swamiji’s only friends used to extend their affectionate hospitality to him. The Swamiji would have his rest after meal at the bookshop. The owner of the shop liked and trusted the Swamiji so much that he would go out on business entrusting the work in the shop to the Swamiji who would then be the shop assistant selling books. It is said that the Swamiji had finished reading all the books in the shop within six months and that he had committed to memory monumental Tamil works like Tholakappiyam Naanool, Manimekhala, Chilapathykaram, Kundalakessi, Thempavani, Thirukural, Ozhuvilotukkam, Thevaram, Thiruvachakam etc. The Swamiji often used to quote extensively from the aphorisms of Thirukkural and Ozhuvilotukkam. Thiruvachakam composed by Saint Manickvachakan was the Swamiji’s favorite. His commentaries and glosses on “Thevaram” and “Thiruvachakam” acknowledged as Vedic in point of scriptural authority are truly learned, profound and scholarly”.

This is one version. But others aver that he had acquired considerable mastery over the Tamil languages even during the first phase of his schooling which extended to his fourteenth. Both these contentions might be true to an extent. It could well be that the familiarity with the language that he acquired during his childhood developed later into exact and comprehensive knowledge in the fullness of time.

For want of proper facilities for higher studies in his village Narayana could not satisfy his thirst for knowledge. All that he could do in this direction was to approach the Sanskrit scholars in the vicinity and learn from them a few minor poems in Sanskrit. This then marked the end of the first phase of his education which continued with his reaching the age of fourteen.

When his schooling was over, he used to help his parents in their household duties. Grazing the cattle was his main occupation. However, he did not look upon this as a piece of insufferable drudgery. He was able to find time for self-education even while working as a cowherd. “In the morning, he will drive the cattle a field, leaving them grazing in some grassy spot. The Swamiji would then seat himself comfortably somewhere and recite the Sanskrit poems he had learnt by heart”. Poet Kumaranasaan has recorded it thus: “The Swamiji used to sit under shady trees during the mid-day hours and lose himself in thought, gazing at the blue sky or learning Sanskrit verses by rote”. The tank he had dug in those days is still to be seen there. A favorite pastime of his was growing betel creeps.

Narayana used to plough the land often under the guidance of his uncle, Krishnan Vaidyar. This work perceptibly brought out the love for all living being, which was deep-rooted in him even at that tender age. While ploughing, he never beat the bulls. He would not use force to

drive them along a particular channel, but let them move as they willed. In the words of Kumaranasaan, "The boy never learnt the method of ploughing the field properly, nor used the stick on the bulls. He just drove the ploughshare into the soil and followed the yoked bulls to wherever they led him".

During this period, love of God which was latent in Narayana began to manifest itself more and more. It became a habit with him to have an early bath in the morning and to smear his forehead with the sacred ashes and sandal paste after offering worship at the temple. It was clear that he did so not as a ritual but as part of a spiritual discipline he had chosen for himself. On certain auspicious days, he spent the whole time in prayers and meditation inside the temple. This had already become a settled habit with him when he had hardly reached the age of 14.

Another peculiarity was his love of travel. To sit idle by was alien to his character. The characteristics of a monk in a seminal form could be seen in him even during his childhood. He would not remain rooted in one place for long. He went on frequent visits to his relatives who had settled down at nearby places like Trivandrum, Anjuthengu, Kayikkara, Venniyode, Nedunganda etc. but wherever he might chance to say, he never failed to practice his Sadhana (spiritual discipline) – early morning bath, worship at the temple, smearing of the sacred ashes, chanting the Lord's names, and meditation. Because of his strict observance of these practices, people began to call him "Nanu Bhakthan" (Nanu, the devotee), some in earnest, some others sarcastically. But Narayana, indifferent alike to bowquets and brickbats, threw himself if heart and soul into the life of a spiritual aspirant.

Narayana was hardly twenty years old when his mother passed away. What impact this event had on the sensitive mind of Narayana we do not know. Probably, the death of his beloved mother deepened his innate spiritual yearnings and turned his mind more pointedly to the Divine.

In the meantime, an unusual incident took place. Pandit K. K. Panikkar in his biography, "Sree Narayana Paramahamsar." Describes it thus: "There was a temple of the Goddess at Chempazhanthi, which used to be deserted for fear of ghosts and apirits, except during the days of the annual festival. Once Swamiji contacted smallpox. He suffered from unbearable fever and headache, but he did not let his people know of it. Nor did he stop practicing his daily discipline of morning bath, worship at the temple etc. On the contrary, the Swami made the temple his home. His parents, not finding the lad at home, consoled themselves with the thought that he might have gone to his relatives as was his wont. There were eruptions all over his body, but he continued his daily ablutions all over his body, but he continued his daily ablutions and devotional exercises. At night, he used to eat whatever food was offered as alms from the houses of some strangers. He spent the daytime reading Vairaagyopadakam, a Sanskrit work (on Vedanta) by Melapathur Bhattathiri and getting in by heart, seated on a branch of the cashew-tree that grew in the temple compound. In this way, unknown to others, the Swamiji spent eighteen days in the temple. On the nineteenth day, completely cured, he returned home. His uncle Krishnan Vaidyar, noticing the fresh pockmarks on his face and body, made anxious inquiries to which the Swamiji gave the calm reply: "I was suffering from smallpox and I stayed in the temple till I recovered". His uncle's anger vanished at this reply, though he was perturbed

about his nephew's conduct of spending days and nights in the temple alone during his illness. However, he felt convinced that the boy possessed some rare powers."

After this strange happening, the uncle began to feel greater love for Narayana. He was unhappy that his nephew could not continue his early education. He resolved that somehow he would provide him with facilities for higher education. And then one day, Narayana interpreted with effortless ease a difficult Sanskrit verse which his learned uncle could not make out. Greatly pleased by this, the old man decided at once to send him for higher education.

AS A STUDENT

It was in his twentieth year that Narayana resumed his education which was interrupted at fourteen. Cheuvannoor Veetil Raman Pillai Aasaan, a profound Sanskrit scholar, was the fortunate person who was destined to play the role of preceptor to Sree Narayan Gurudeva.

The fame of Raman Pillai Aasaan had spread far and wide, for he had the unique gift of attracting those who were thirsty for knowledge. He was a scholar in all branches of learning. Convinced that no better teacher could be had for education of his precocious nephew, Krishnan Vaidyar gladly sent Narayana to Raman Pillai Aasaan who lived at Karunagappally.

At the time of Narayana's departure for Karunagappally, his uncle offered a small amount of money to Narayana. But the boy did not accept it. "I do not feel the necessity for money." "But I do feel it is unfair to let yourself part with money at the time of parting from me. It is in the fitness of things therefore that the money is kept here itself". Saying this in all humility, Narayana bade good-bye to his uncle. Evidently, even at that age, Narayana had the spirit of non-possession (Aparigraha) to a high degree.

Although he could study at a place attached to Aasaan's Cheruvannur house, Narayana had to find a suitable lodging elsewhere since he was an Ezhava by caste. Many other Ezhava students of Raman Pillai Aasaan also faced this problem of residence. At Varanappalli, a wealthy and aristocratic Ezhava house was the only way out for them. It was here that Narayana too found facilities for his residence. The house of Varanappalli considered it their proud privilege to provide all assistance including free food to students coming there for education from distant places. Narayana took up residence at Kunnathuveedu, a branch of the house of Varanappalli, during the period of his higher education.

At that time, there were more than sixty students studying under the guidance of Raman Pillai Aasaan. According to Mookrath Kumaranasan., "Among the students, Narayana was found endowed with such intelligence and imaginative power that he could easily absorb, like the mythical Vimalamani, not only what the Aasaan taught but a great deal more besides. In his prodigious hunger and thirst for knowledge, the student Nanu could well be compared to Lord

Ganapathy who, when invited by Kubera, the God of wealth for a sumptuous breakfast ate up all the excellent fare before Him, and was still hungry. A couple of verses from “Raghuvamsa” were the daily dose of institution. Disappointed at this slow pace, the student complained to the teacher one day that at that rate it might never be possible for him to complete his education and go to work. The teacher then commanded the student to listen to what he was teaching the other boys too. From that day Narayana started learning advanced lessons as well. When, after completing “Reghuvamsa”, another poetic work was taken up for study, the teacher discovered that Nanu could make out the meaning of all the verses by himself. Moreover, he had learnt by heart one of the poetic works that the teacher had taught the other students. On certain occasions, Nanu could explain with clarity the meaning of several verses which the teacher himself could not get at. Thus, our hero became the recipient of Aasaan's blessings and felicitations as well as the object of praise and envy at the hands of other”.

Although foremost in studies, Narayana never indulged in gossip with friends. He was a lover of solitude. While his colleagues carried on their discussions or small talk after their meal at night, Narayana could be seen sitting alone in a corner lost in his own thoughts. Sometimes they were involved in heated controversies on literary topics. When they could come to no satisfactory conclusions, Narayana would be approached for an impartial opinion. With remarkable dispassion and objectivity, he would marshal the pros and cons of the question and pronounce his judgment which was invariably acceptable to all.

However, his lofty aloofness forms the controversies of the day and idle gossip drew sarcastic comments from most of his classmates. They did not understand or appreciate that his immature nature did not allow him to participate in discussions which often degenerated into low level talk on sex. They used to make fun of him by composing limericks his adolescent otherworldliness like this:

The god who made Nanu so shy
Was beyond all measure dry
For sure, He wasn't our Maker
For that would be highly improper

However, Poet Muleer records an incident which clearly illustrates Narayana's attitude and inclinations in those days: “There were two dogs in Varanappalli, one a very big and strong one other quite small and dirty. The Swamiji used to feed the small one with what was left over in his meal. Occasionally it so happened that the big dog would appear on the scene from nowhere and ate up the food, driving away the weak one. When the latter moaned piteously, painfully bitten by the other, the Swamiji would look at it almost in tears and say reproachfully about the big dog, “Its heart is very bad. What indeed can we do about it?”

Kunhukunhu Panikkar, a junior member of the house of Varanappalli, used to show great regard for Nararana. Many were the occasions when he saved Narayana from his teasing colleagues. Devotion to God was a common bond between them and whenever they got the opportunity, they sat together like the Ramayanam and Bhagavatham. They used to practice

Japa keeping awake far into the night. Sometime, awaking up after a snatch of sleep, Panikkar could still see Nanu absorbed in Japa. It was also a queer habit with him in these days to sit with eyes upturned as in deep meditation. This he used to do when he felt pretty sure that nobody was about to see him sitting in that uneasy posture with his legs tied fast to his neck with a towel.

During his stay at the house of Varanappalli, the Swami not only read Sanskrit poetry and drama, but also practiced spiritual discipline in which he had already attained some degree of progress.

In food habits, he had no particular likes and dislikes although he developed a distaste for fish and meat. However, on occasion he had to eat even these under pressure from some of his mischief-loving friends. Even then he used to chew a variety of leaves and eat some of them. His classmates used to make fun of him then, saying: "See, Nanu is swallowing leaves to satisfy his great hunger."

Here the Guru became more than a mere Sanskrit scholar that is to say, more than was required for the purpose of Ayurveda, or Astrology, which was the level attained in his own village. He was now a dilettante instructed in Kavya, Nataka and Alankara (poetry, drama and literary criticism with rhetoric). He soon went beyond even this stage by himself and the secrets of the Vedantic and Upanishadic Wisdom became an open book to him by sheer dint of his straight forward simplicity, his purity of life, and with his alert positiveness of mental outlook and discipline.

Sree Krishna was his chosen deity in those days. He had composed several hymns in praise of Sree Krishna and Lord Vishnu. Many of them in later years were popular among devotees. It was from those days that the poet in Narayana began to be noticed. Another composition of his belonging to this period was 'Gajendramoksham' in the 'Vanchippattu' metre.

Narayana was not just one of those dry devotees whose devotion was confined to routine rituals-his bordered on the experiential. As already stated, his chosen deity was Sree Krishna. "Many were the instances", records Shri Ayyakutty, a retired judge, "when the Boy Krishna used to appear before him in these days in the states of waking and dream consciousness. The Swami has said that on certain occasions he has been able to see the Divine form of the Boy Krishna wherever he happened to look."

One day during his stay at Varanappalli, the Swami had a sudden vision of Krishna. He started running in the direction he saw the Divine Cowherd standing. The others, of course could see nothing. The Swami ran along the fields and stood on the bank of a stream. On being asked, the Swami replied, "Krishna has just dived into the stream here."

Shortly before he left Varanappalli, Narayana asked Govinda Panikkar, a classmate of his and kinsman of the house of Varanappalli, to buy him a water-jug made of copper. When asked what he wanted it for, he gave the strange reply that he was preparing himself for a plunge in a vast ocean and that he wanted the vessel for preserving what he might be able to collect for the people of the house.

His studentship and life at Varanappalli lasted only for about four years. By then, the Swami had contracted dysentery which increased day by day. Treatment had little effect on his condition which threatened to become comatose. Alarmed at this turn, his people took him home, thus putting an end to his association with Varanappalli. When the time of parting came, everyone there felt sad, all the more because he was dangerously ill. They had all come to love the gentle, virtuous lad.

Till the end of his earthly life many years after, the Swami had a special love and compassion for members of that family. During one of his many tours in that area for collection of funds for the maintenance of schools established at Varkala, someone asked him, "Are we not to go to Varanappalli?" The Swami's smiling reply was, "From that place, money was collected in advance already."

BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

After his return from Karunagapalli putting an end to his education, Nanu Aasan, as he came to be called, gradually recovered from his illness. However, the changes that came over his life during his stay there remained deeprooted in him. He was totally indifferent to household affairs. He had the firm conviction that he was cut out for a mission in life. He did not have the least desire to lead a life enmeshed in worldliness. He fully knew that it was impossible for his mind, trained from boyhood to turn Godward, to find contentment and joy in such a life. He was searching for the means to fulfil his heart's desire, his thirst for the realization of truth, for the attainment of God-consciousness. This will become quite clear to anyone making a study of his works written during this period.

So, returning home after the termination of his studies, Narayana chose to tread along a path of life which was in consonance with his vision of life. He refused to be tied down to his hearth and home or to the duties and responsibilities of a householder. Instead, he found delight in the life of a teacher imparting to others the knowledge that he had learnt and assimilated. He taught in his native village as well as in places like Anchuthengu he taught many people sacred texts like the Bhagavad Gita holding his classes in the hall near the Jhaneshwara Temple. Along with teaching, chanting of the divine names and meditation took up a good deal of his time. During that period, he had composed many devotional poems and hymns. He also completed a prose work on the spiritual principle of the Universe.

It would be wrong to assume that he had no difficulties in doing his spiritual practices. Extraordinary as the man was, he had his share of human weaknesses. But he was able to develop enough will power to fight against the negative tendencies of the mind relentlessly he could master them completely.

This period in Narayana's life was one of inner friction and conflict. Two powerful forces of thought were pulling him in opposite directions. On the one hand, he left a deep sense of love, attachment and duty towards his family and relations. He felt an even greater affection of

his father after the passing away of his mother. He was particularly fond of his uncle who had educated him with love and high hopes about his future. At the same time, he felt an irresistible urge to lead a life moving Godward, away from all earthly ties. Along with this, he was very conscious of his mind which tried to draw him forcibly to worldly affairs. The poems and hymns which he had composed at that time amply illustrates the incessant struggle that raged in his heart, the battle between the inborn and deep-rooted spiritual hunger and attachment to material comforts growing with the blossoming of his youth. Often, he felt helpless, caught in the coils of opposing forces and prayed to his chosen Deity to save him from the crisis. His prayers must have been heard by the All-merciful Lord who granted to him the soul-force to move forward along the spiritual path.

Taking advantage of this situation, his relatives in league with some others tried to bind him fast to a matrimonial life. They believed that the only way to bring sanity to the unhinged Nanu Swami was to get him married. This indeed has been the experience of many spiritual aspirants bending their way Godward. They were forced to submit themselves to the dictates of their near and dear ones. In Swami Vivekananda case, the efforts of his people to get him married came to nothing, as it happened. His Guru, Sree Ramakrishna, married but marriage brought him no sense of worldly attachment or bondage. The Paramahansa turned even his marital relationship into an instrument for spiritual advancement and for the welfare of the world. Narayana Guru had to face a similar trial at this juncture.

The young man finally married in obedience to the command of his guardians. However, the bridegroom did not visit the bride's house after marriage-an omission which violated the convention. The bride was the niece of his father. her house was in Nadunganda, near Varkala. After his forced marriage, Narayana did not go to his own house either, for more than two months. One day the man who had negotiated his marriage started pressing him to visit his wife's house. The Swami finally relented and went to her house accompanied by the man. But he did not go inside and sat in the portico whereupon the wife placed before him a plate of eatables. The Swami then went inside and returned with a bunch of ripe plantains of which he ate one or two and gave away the rest to his escort. The final act in this drama was a short discourse by the strange bridegroom to the members of the household whom he had summoned. Said the Swami, "Each man has come into this world to realize his own particular purpose in life. You and I have to gain some definite and distinct ends. Consciously or otherwise, we are forced to realize them in those given ways. Therefore, look after your affairs as I have to mine own." Then the Swami stood up and walked out, never again to stop into that house. Thus ended Narayana Guru's marital life.

About the Swami's married life, Nataraj Guru in his book, Word of the Guru, has recorded thus:-

"The lady was the daughter of a medical man of an ancient school of toxicology (Vishva Vaidyam) and the cures for poisons. The Guru used to visit this vaidyam frequently. The families of the two households, those of the Guru and this medical scholar of Chiravinkil village became intimate. The Guru and two sisters who were interested in seeing that he was married in the usual way by arrangement, and so it was done, without consulting the Guru, as was the custom

in those days. A simple wedding took place in which the sisters took the leading initiative in all matters, as customs permitted in the locality. The cloth and gold neck-trinket were exchanged by proxy by the sisters, while the bridegroom sat unconcerned, roading and explaining the Ramayana-his normal vocation.

All was over. The wife lived in the maternal home, after the matriarchal system which prevailed in Malabar, and still prevails today in the circle of the ruling family of Travancore. The Guru lived under the same roof off-and-on. About the degree of intimacy of the conjugal relations, the present writer has not been able to draw out any definite evidence, even in spite of his willful attack on the subject. All that could be extracted from those who knew the couple was a reported remark from the Guru's lips soon after the marriage. He is purported to have said, "Now the Vaidyan (Medical man) is happy that all the rooms of his house are occupied." This was in reference to his taking up residence occasionally in the house of the father of his bride.

With the ever-widening path of Guruhood that our hero began to tread on as more and more years went by, the question of his married life and family relations receded more and more into the background. It was thus naturally and normally transcended. She died, and no children of the marriage are known to have seen the light of the day.

"As ill-suck would have it, some people have aired their unfounded ideas and opinions about the Swami's married life. They are determined to measure the world with nothing other than their own yardstick. One feels profound sympathy for such people trying to plump the depth of the unfathomable ocean with their knowledge of a shallow pond. They are those who conclude that tendencies and weaknesses which they had during that age were to be seen in Narayana as well. What is more, they argue that, like themselves, he also must have acted rashly under the influence of these weaknesses and failings. How sacred and blessed is this land of Bharat made holy by the lives of innumerable great souls who have succeeded in living a life of pure continance by overcoming unbending and apparently unconquerable desires of their mind by dint of their indomitable will, burning idealism and above all by the measureless grace of the Almighty! What basis other than the perverted imagination of their own mean minds can there be for concluding that Sree Narayana, who hails a kindred spirit in superman like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Dayananda and Ramana, has had a fall from the path of spirituality?"

The authoritative biography of the Swami has recorded the following on the subject, "We are in possession of accurate information regarding how some people on certain occasions had tried wantonly but in vain to force the Swami to swerve from the path of celibacy."

The pronouncement on this subject of Sahodaran Ayyapan, the most intimate associate of the Swami, deserves our closet attention. "Those who have known the Swami at close quarters speak with one voice that his celibate life has not been defiled even by a whit. It is well-known how Aasan has described him 'Ugravrata' i.e, one who practices astounding austerities. The term does truly describe the Swami's pure and abiding celibacy and firmness of character. However, it is true that during the early days of his life as a Sanyasi, there had been a struggle going on within him for self-mastery. This becomes clear from some of the hymns he had composed during that period. The Buddha and Jesus Christ too had to carry on such inner

struggles. The Swami himself had told me that in the early days he had aimlessly walked many miles on certain nights. These wanderings might have been when self-control had eluded him in meditation. This is my own inference, for the Swami did not tell me so”.

Moreover, his own words are a proof of his success in leading a life of absolute celibacy. When news has brought to him that a disciple of his, considered as one destined to be a life-long celibate, was planning to get married, the Swami said, “Celibacy, is the most arduous austerity. Only he who practiced it with success knows how exacting it is. Therefore one must marry the moment one realizes that it is no longer possible to be continent.”

In 1884, the Swami's father passed away. The Guru had left his home a few days earlier. His uncle went in search of him and found him at a place thirty miles away where he was giving lessons to a few boys. However, he returned home just before his father's death as if he had a premonition of the event.

From the words of the neighbours who were present there at the time, we get a picture of the scene at the death-bed. In his last hours the old man was afflicted by the thought that he might have to leave the world before seeing his son. But Narayana appeared just in time. With a look of infinite love and relief, the father expressed his last wish, “My wise son, living on alms : Feed me with your holy hand”. Having received his last morsel of food at the hands of his Sanyasi-son living on “Madhukari-bhiksha” (food received in the hollow of one's palm from several doors even as the bee gathers honey from many a flower in the garden), the father passed away.

With the death of the father, the last link with the family was severed. His mother had left the world even earlier. His marriage had not grown into any degree of relationship at all. So the death of his father brought about a condition of complete freedom for Narayana to follow the path of renunciation on which he had set his heart right from his adolescent days.

THE SAGE OF MARUTHWAMALA

As Narayana began his journey in quest of true knowledge he was gripped by an intense wish to study the scriptures and Vedanta philosophy. He was in search of the right teacher and approached many scholars and sanyasis and sought their guidance for God-realisation. Among them was “Ramabrahma Swamigal” who had a large following of disciples. Yet he was found wanting in satisfying Sree Narayana's thirst for knowledge. It was then that he happened to come into contact with Chattambi Swamigal at the Ariyoor temple. At their very first meeting, they recognized each other's competence. Chattambi Swamigal, who was then residing at Vamanapuram with an engineering overseer, invited Narayana to that place. It is said that while staying there Sree Narayana Guru was initiated into the “Balasubrahmanya Mantram” by Chattambi Swamigal.

From then onwards, they became close associates. The love and reverence that they had for each other was unique. Often, they used to meet another saint, Thycaud Ayya. Chattambi Swamigal and Sree Narayana Guru became brother disciples of Thycaud Ayya.

The companionship between these two rare brother-disciples continued for long. They spent their time-serving holy men, meditating in solitude, making pilgrimages to places like Maruthwamala, living on roots and fruits and water from the springs and living in the company of wild animals. There was hardly a place in the southern parts that had not received the imprint of their holy feet. It was during these wanderings that they had come upon Aruvippuram. It must also be stated that in the meantime these intenerant monks had already travelled far along the path of spirituality.

The coming together of Chattambi Swamigal and himself was a turning point in the life of Narayana Guru. For, at that juncture, guidance from an elder brother to lead him by the hand onward from the state of spiritual development that he had attained was of great help to him. Discovering this endless potentialities of growth in Narayana, Chattambi Swamigal gave him proper directions and helped him to unfold himself fully. This meeting of minds was not just a rapport between two noble souls. It had a historical significance as well, for it was the coming together of two communities. Chattambi Swamigal used to evince keen interest in mingling the Ezhava families even in those days. It was with his Ezhava friends that he had stayed most of the time in Trivandrum. Swamigal and Shree Narayana Guru greatly helped in uniting these two powerful communities in Kerala in bonds of love.

Nataraja Guru writes :-

“In fact, around the personality of his senior companion, who represented the solid native wisdom of the soil, was building up a wave of renaissance-literary, cultural and spiritual in the Travancore of the early nineties. A group of poets, grammarians, Yogis and men well versed in Ayurveda was at work to spread the movement.

The Guru's sensitive mind responded well to the situation, Kunjab Pillay Chattambi, who was one of the leaders of the renaissance group, soon recognized the potentialities of the Guru Narayana and consciously encouraged him to unfold and open out, and by his intelligent elderly guidance helped the shy, young and retiring Nanu of those days. One of the early compositions of the Guru called Navamanjari (Nine verses) acknowledges at the beginning how it came to be written at the instance of “Sisi Nama Guru”, which is the Sanskrit rendering of the name of Kunjan Pillay whom the Guru Narayana, at the start of his own spiritual endeavour, avowedly called a ‘Guru’. This is as calling him his own “Guru”.

It is pertinent to record here the thought-provoking views of Brother Ayyappan on this controversial topic : “I have heard, in my younger days, that Chattambi Swami was the Swami's Guru. In the short biography of Swami written by Kumaran Aasaan is found recorded that he and Chattambi Swami were friends and companions. This had become a matter of controversy among some people. The view expressed by Aasaan that the Swami and Chattambi Swami were companions might be true. But it does not follow that one cannot be the disciple of one's friend and companion. The Swami used to hold Chattambi Swami in high respect and esteem. The elegy written by the Swami on the death of Chattambi Swami shows the great esteem he had for the latter. Chattambi swami is described in those verses as the all-knowing Rishi, the Great Master, the perfect treasure-house of all arts. It is not a genuine desire to establish the truth as to whether Chattambi Swami was the Guru of the Swami or not that is revealed by

either party in the controversy. There is nothing wrong if it were shown that Chattambi Swami was the Swami's Guru or that he was not the Guru".

Chattambi Swamigal and Narayana Guru both realized that the all-round progress of Kerala, the arena of their activities, depended on the goodwill and co-operation of the Nayar and Ezhava communities in which they were born respectively. The conflict between these two communities threatened to ruin Kerala. Chattambi Swamigal and Narayana Guru were above the narrow loyalties of caste and community. However, they were naturally chosen as the spiritual teachers of the communities in which they were born. Their spiritual kinship and regard for each other was a powerful factor in bridging the gulf between the two communities.

Sree Narayana had another Guru in "Thycaud Ayyava" who taught him yogic practices. As already stated, it was Chattambi Swamigal who had introduced Narayanan to him. Sri Ayyava was a Tamilian employed at the British Residency in Trivandrum. He had attained to such proficiency in the practice of the yogic feats (kriyas) like breath control that he could perform several miracles. Acceting him as his Guru, Narayana practiced yogic postures and mediation according to several systems in yoga. He also learnt yogic methods such as "Nouli", "Dhouthi", "Ghatak" and the "Khechari Mudra". Chattambi Swamigal was also a student of yogic practices under Ayyavu. Under instructions from his Guru, Chattambi Swamigal gave practical demonstration of the yogic methods to Narayana Guru on several occasions.

Sree Narayana later went to the hills of Maruthwan in order to practice yoga in solitude and attain proficiency in it. Maruthwan was eminently suited for spiritual practices. The popular belief is that here sages have been doing penance from the earliest times. It was the cave known as 'pillathadam' the Swami chose this for his abode. As the entrance to this large cave faced the sea, a fine breeze fanned the place all the time. Seated on the 'darbha' grass in yogic posture, he spent a long time there in contemplation.

"Here is the last southern most stone of India, where Vivekananda of Bengal sought the same prehistoric Mother and sat meditating on the blackened rocks which rise out of the multicoloured sands by the everlasting sea. The caverns in the nearby hills, and the lotus ponds abounding in the locality, where the great seas meet from east and west, and pure oceanic breezes sweep forever across the land, unhindered and uncontaminated, were favourable to the formation of the pearl of the potent Word-formula in the Guru Narayana. The personality of the Guru matured here and attained to its full stature of Guru-value."

We do not know exactly how long remained on the hills of Maruthwan. But there is no doubt that it was while practicing intense tapasya (austerities) on these hills that he attained to the lofty planes of spiritual experience. The beautiful Maruthwan is not far off from Kanyakumari which is constantly washed by the waves of the three oceans. It was at Kanyakumari that Swami Vivekananda once sat in meditation on a rock-literally the southernmost tip of India, and had a vision of the Mother of the Universe, the Primordial Energy, and formulated his life's mission and message. Around the Maruthwan hills were many caves and caverns which offered the recluse ideal for undisturbed meditation amidst serene silence, endless vistas of emerald green paddy fields, lakes full of water-lillies and white lotuses, the cool and bracing breeze blowing from the vast, boundless seas. Sree Narayana found the environment congenial to

transform the spiritual lessons he had received into priceless pearls of experience and realization.

Where did he get his food during all those days and who were with him in this spiritual adventure? We have no clear facts to present on these points except mere stories and heresay. He might have stepped down the hills occasionally for seeking alms as a sadhu. Or, as a disciplined spiritual aspirant, he might have reduced his food to the barest minimum. Moorkoth Kumaran has recorded thus: "It could be learnt from the conversations with the Swami that he had lived mostly on leaves, roots and fruits. It is to be surmised that there was no forest-leaf that he had not tasted. The Swami knew that such and such leaves were fit for eating. There is a plant known as 'Kathukkali' whose leaves when soaked and kneaded would become hard like native cakes in a short time. The Swami himself had said that one could live on that food only. It has no pleasant taste, though it is good for health. Then there is a creeper known as 'Atambu' whose leaves are soft. But the Swami was aware that one falls ill if one eats this leaf too much. The root called 'Atapathiyan' found in plenty in the hills, is an excellent food. It is said that one can live in good health on this root, honey and water. Similar is the case with the leaves of 'Thazhuthama' of the wild variety. The Swami used to eat these leaves and root while doing penance on the forest hills. He had, in fact, sustained himself on such a diet."

The following incident was narrated by the Swami himself: One night when he came out of his cave after meditation, he felt very hungry. An old leper suddenly turned up from nobody knew where and gave him some powdered rice for food, and water in a palmyra leaf. The two of them sat together at their meal. After a while, the old man disappeared as mysteriously as he appeared, leaving the Swami wondering about it all.

Another story is about a devotee who used to attend on the Swami and serve him during his tapasya on the hills of Maruthwan. He was one Chettiar, an overseer. Hearing that "Nanu Aasan" was there, he went to the hills where he discovered the cave known as 'Pillaithadam'. He saw there the Swami in deep meditation with two tigers lying quietly on either side of him at a little distance. Shortly afterwards, the Swami woke up from meditation and saw the two tigers lying near him. Looking at them, he showed some signs at which they stood up and walked away with slow, unhurried steps, and disappeared from the scene. Chettiar used to speak of this incident to his friends and the Swami's devotees.

THE WANDERING MONK

The theocentric contemplative, who attained self-realisation through intense austerities in the hills of Maruthwan, at last came back to the people. Instead of staying at any place permanently, he was always on the move looking like an aimless wanderer. He traveled extensively in South India with no definite destination or wanting to do anything in particular. During those days, he lived the life of a true itinerant monk with perfect renunciation and

detachment. The state of Sree Narayana Guru then was like that of the serene-minded sages described by Sree Sankara : “Santha mahantho tharayanthah.”

There are those great souls of serene contentment who, having crossed the dark and dangerous sea of transmigration themselves, wander about freely through the world like spring motivated by pure compassion for mankind whom they help in liberating from the bondage.

As a biographer of the Swami described, Sree Narayana Guru was flowing like the river Kaveri in the garb of a wandering monk through South India, carrying within himself priceless treasures which the needy and the deserving would discover and make use of for their welfare. He became the centre of attraction wherever he went. In the words of Kumaranasan, “As a young man, the Swami was naturally handsome and was of a calm and gentle disposition. The lustre on his face marked him out even in a crowd. He used to avoid the crowds of men and wander alone. In those days, a crowd would gather around him whenever he was spotted out in any village or town.”

Some of his travel experiences which he had narrated to his disciples are touching. Once he happened to see a sadhu (sanyasin or poor man?) sleeping soundly at a wayside inn. He had no earthly possessions except his staff and the begging bowl. Looking at him, the Swami exclaimed, “Poor man, he is in deep sleep. God alone knows whether he has had his meager meal: I had also wandered like this in days gone by, moving from place to place. Walking till sundown, I used to look out for a place to rest and sleep during the night. The very sight of such an inn or a temple was a great relief in those conditions”!

“I have traveled”, continued the Swami, “all over Tamilnadu when journey by train was unknown. Once I reached Coimbatore by the circuitous route touching Tinnevely. From Coimbatore, I walked to Pollachi and from there on to Palani. From Palani, I returned to Malabar on foot and then pressed forward to reach Cochin. Crossing the backwaters there, I continued my journey on the other side.”

During these wanderings he often suffered severe hard ships. He said: “One had to eat anything that came one’s way. Once during my wanderings in alien lands, I reached a village well past the midnight. I was very hungry. Looking around, I saw a few, large water-troughs meant for the cattle. Putting my hand in one of them, I discovered that particles of rice were deposited at the bottom of the through. Carefully collecting them on a piece of cloth and draining them of water, I ate that food, satisfying my hunger as best as I could.”

Thus, the wandering monk continued his seemingly unending journey without respite. The words of Swami Dharmatheertha-a wanderer himself-aptly describe Gurudev’s state of mind in those days.

“I used to travel all over the country on foot, studiously avoiding the use of any vehicle. I did not seek anything except the dusty earth where I slept during the nights. The open, uninhabited places were to me my happy home. And my companions were among the poorest. Fine clothes had absolutely no fascination for me and I was perfectly satisfied with some tattered and worn-out pieces to cover myself, like those worn by the Paravas and Pulayas, the

lowliest and the poorest among men. When hunger became unbearable, I begged at the doors of the pure-hearted and felt satisfied with whatever was offered by them. When the sun or rain became unbearable, I would not seek shelter in any house but retire to the shadow of the trees in the forest or to a cave there."

With the fire of renunciation burning in his heart, Sree Narayana thus moved on as a wandering monk, clothed in rags living on alms and spending the nights at wayside temples or under the roof of the sky. He lived in the midst of the poor, himself a poor man, and saw for himself their grinding poverty and their superstitions which in innumerable cases, added to their misery and brought about their ruin. He saw with his own eyes the oppression and injustice which they were subjected to. Though he looked upon all living beings as his kith and kin and so could not be attached to anyone in particular, he became a friend and companion of the weak and the distressed.

In the course of these wanderings, the Swami had the good fortune to come into contact with a yogini. We read in the biography of Sree Ramakrishnan that he was blessed by a yogini who was brought to him by the will of God. Swami Vidyananda Theerthapada in his biography of Sree Theerthapada Paramahansa records the meeting between Sree Narayana and the yogini thus : "In those days, a yogini was resting somewhere on the Vagercoil road. She was totally oblivious of her surroundings as she was profoundly absorbed in the yoga-trance. Her fame had spread throughout southern Travancore and naturally, the Swami wanted to go there and meet her.

It was Sree Narayana Guru himself who went to meet her. He reached Nagercoil by about nine'o clock in the morning. A large crowd had gathered around the yogini by then. Among them was a Tahsildar who wanted to worship her, among other offerings, with a couple of ripe graft mangoes obtained from the tree he had fondly reared. Seeing the large crowd, Sree Narayana Guru retired to the shade of a nearby tree hoping that he could meet her when the din and bustle of the crowd subsided. He was quite tired as he was tormented with hunger and thirst. The yogini, as was usual with her, was reclining with eyes closed. But miraculously, on that occasion, she opened her eyes and cast a serene glance at the articles of offering brought to her. Thereupon she directed, by means of gestures, that those articles be given to a particular person in the crowd who was pointed out by a wave of her hand in a particular direction. With this, her eyes shining like a pair of red lotuses, closed once again. But no one assembled there could identify that person. The Tahsildar once again approached her humbly and stood waiting by her side for about half an hour. She then opened her eyes and waved her hand again in a particular direction, also indicating that she wanted the crowd to clear the way. She pointed out Sree Narayana Guru who was seated at some distance and then pointed a finger at the articles of offering. It was obvious that the yogini could not have seen the Swami from where she was resting. Not a little surprised at this, the Tahsildar with the other assembled devotees hastened to the presence of Sree Narayana Guru whom they looked upon as a great mystic. Offering the articles to him, they prostrated at his feet. Refreshed by the repast of the mango fruit and other articles of offering, the Swami found himself besieged by devotees inviting him to their homes. Yielding to their loving (entreaties) he visited their houses in Nagercoil and remained with each one of them for a day. Those devotees used to offer him food as if to God

after performing rituals like washing his living image etc. In spite of his indifference to these ritualistic modes of worship, he had to submit himself to them, helpless before their utter devotion. The result of this ritualistic modes of worship, he had to submit himself to them, helpless before their utter devotion. The result of this ritualistic modes of worship of him, however, was severe fever and inflammation of gland. The Swami had to stay with his devotees till his ailments subsided. However, even during this time, on occasions when no one was about, he used to go to the yogini before whom he prostrated. It is known that the Swami had received her blessings in full measure and that he had kept Sree Chattambi Swamikal, who was then at Trivandrum, informed of this holy privilege. "You are destined to carry out a great deal of God's work. Such might be the course of your life as directed by the actions in your previous births –"Prarabdha."

It was in the midst of the depressed classes that Swami spent most of the time during his itinerary. And no wonder about it when we realize that their awakening and uplift was his life's mission. To spend days among the poor fisherman was of special delight to him.

We have the Swami's own words as heard and recorded by the limerist , Mulur :

"It was usual for me during my stay in Trivandrum to visit the fishermen at night and sleep on the catamarans lying about on the shore. Long before sunrise when the fishermen would launch their catamarans and go for fishing. I would leave the place and go on a walk to place thirty or forty miles away. Such long walk never caused leg weariness or similar troubles for me in those days. I used to stay with the Mohammedans and eat food in their company, eating fish and meat as they did. It was my practice then to fondle their children and feed them with my own hands."

The account of the Swami's life during that period by P.K. Balakrishnan deserves careful study : "The life of the Swami immediately preceeding his installation of the idol in the temple at Aruvippuram is shrouded in mystery. No one knows for certain what the Swami was engaged in during the considerable length of time before he came into the limelight. All the highways and by-lanes of Kerala must have received his footprints many a time during this period. It was a travel without any destination and the thought as to where his next meal would come from or where to rest for the night never as much as crossed his mind. That sturdy young man of slender built, wearing a white dhoti and a towel thrown over the shoulders was wandering aimlessly, interminably. He was not a Sanyasin either in appearance or in observances; he was just an ordinary tramp in his looks as well as in his mode of living. Walking for hours in the hot sun, the young man would reach the courtyard of a house in some village by about midday and to queries or to the remonstrance from any member of the household, he would reply, "Just stepped in for shelter from the sun." Perhaps the householder noticed the gentleness, love and intelligence that his shining eyes and beaming face proclaimed. He would rest there after eating what was offered to him. The children of the house full of innocent curiosity might have gathered round him and plied him with their little questions. And he, in his turn, might have delighted them with his jokes and witty sayings. Perhaps the young man, an expert physician, casually suggested a wonder-cure for an ailing member of household and the result probably was miraculous recovery from the incurable disease. Seeing the same man in their courtyard one

evening years later, they might have been overwhelmed with joy, and received him with great respect and devotion. Many were the years that the nameless and homeless wanderer had spent in this way. And many indeed were the poor households in various parts of Kerala that must have deemed it their great good fortune to have set their eyes on this aimless wanderer”.

Thus he wandered among the commoners of Kerala in their garb, sharing their life in weal and woe. There was nothing unusual in his appearance as a monk with a shaven face and crown. He used to eat with relish what was offered from the hutments he chanced to visit for a little rest. The Swami observed strict cleanliness both internally and externally. It was as a part of this discipline that he became a vegetarian and enforced the practice in his ashram and elsewhere.

It is difficult to determine the areas that came within the ambit of his long sojourn ‘Parivrajaka.’ Nor is it probable that enough light will be thrown on this obscure period in his life history. Yet, the words of Swami Nijananda, the Head of the Sivagiri Mutt, do give an inkling: “It is held by the enlightened that Swami had wandered to the far corners of the land from Kailas to Kanyakumari and from Gujarat to Assam and had made a pilgrimage to all shrines and sacred rivers in the country”.

ARUVIPPURAM

It was during the days of his wanderings with Chattambi Swamikal that Sree Narayana Guru happened to visit Aruvippuram. They were altogether charmed by the sylvan beauty of the area. It is often seen that men of spirituality are also lovers of natural beauty. They find in it the presence of God in another form and so feel drawn towards it. That is why all the holy places chosen for religious practices and meditation on God happen to be Nature’s playground. Chattambi Swamikal has poetically recollected his visit to Aruvippuram in the company of Sree Narayana Guru during their wanderings in Kerala. Evidently he was attracted by the serenity of the wood-land watered by limpid streams. Having enjoyed the solitude of the place in companionship with Sree Narayana Guru for a few days, Chattambi Swamikal returned to Trivandrum. Sree Narayana Guru remained there. As Poet Kumaran Assan puts it, “The majestic music made by the river as it dashed against the rocks, the rocky caverns and the sand-dunes on the shores, the high hills on either side of the river and the forests thick with tall trees and green vegetation had an unusual fascination for the solitude-loving Swami. Sometimes the Swami spent several days together in the rocky caverns there without food, and unnoticed by anyone in the wide world.”

Immersed in the bliss of own Self, seeing God in all beings and feeling one even with the plants and trees and the wild beasts in the forest, Sree Narayana Guru lived at Aruvippuram in lone splendour like a Jivanmukta (one liberated-in-life). This picture of the Swami imprinted in his mind might have inspired the poet in drawing the portrait of the sainthero of his poem, Nalini

for Sree Narayana Guru answered to the description of the monk in the poem even to the last detail.

It was during his stay at Aruvippuram that the renowned Sivalinga Swamigal became the disciple of Sree Narayana Gurudeva. In course of time, the news spread that a monk of great spiritual attainment was living at Aruvippuram. The people talked of the divinity of the man and of his miraculous powers. Their wonder was all the greater when they came to know that the saint was none other than the Nanu of 'Vayalvaram'. All this resulted in the incessant flow of people to Aruvippuram.

Of this change, Kumaran Assan writes : "After this, Aruvippuram was no longer the old place of solitude. People from several quarters began to flock there in search of the Swami. To cure people of their diseases, to exorcise evil spirits, to teach religious texts, to give spiritual advice and to bless the godly-minded in several other ways were the duties that still dogged his footsteps even in that solitary retreat. People in those days had indirect knowledge of the Swami's miraculous powers such as mind-reading and prophetic vision. Numerous devotees belonging to all castes used to visit the place for his 'darshan' and some of those visitors became his disciples in later years. It was customary on the part of several household devotees from far-off places to bring rice and other things to Aruvippuram and give feasts to the Swami and to his circle of friends and devotees. Thus, the place became a holy spot by the mere presence of the Swami".

About men of God-realisation, Sree Ramakrishna used to say, "The flower has only to bloom, it need not go in search of the bees. They will go to the flower in quest of honey". How true those words are of the life of Sree Narayana Guru! Hardly had the flower opened its petals in that lonely forest, the haunt of wild beasts, when innumerable bees swarmed it thirsty for honey.

The Swami's heart overflowed with love and sympathy for his people. What could he do for them? What did they seek from him? The Swami must have pondered over these questions deeply. The stream of devotees continued even during his absence. A vast concourse of men and women would reach the spot daily, have a bath in the river and then begin the chanting of prayers, hymns and devotional songs. They would then return to their homes as if they had experienced an ineffable joy. This was their practice.

The Swami knew the secret of this magnetic pull intuitively. Most of those who went to aruvippuram were the lower caste Hindus who were prevented by caste rules from offering worship at the temples owned by the higher castes. When they felt at Aruvippuram was the freedom to offer worship with dignity and self-respect. There was no temple in that place but that made no difference to them. Here was a man of God who knew their sorrows in life, to whom they could speak out their heart's secrets and who might offer them some consolation in life. After all, was he not of them-one who had reached the heights of greatness by his own powers? The community as a whole felt that it had stumbled on an invaluable treasure. It was like the recovery of one's lost soul.

The Gurudev thought that the time had come for them to have a place of worship which they could call their own- a temple at which they could worship God fearlessly and with their heads held high. It was not to be a temple with animal sacrifice and toddy-offering like the ones they were used to, but a temple where they could go, pure in body and mind, and offer worship to 'Satwic' deities with fruits and flowers, the way the caste Hindus did it. He knew that a temple of this kind would not only quench their spiritual thirst but will also help them enhance their self-respect.

Therefore, the Swami unfolded before his devotees his plan of founding a temple at Aruvippuram. They were thrilled. They stood with folded hands before the great soul whose advent promised to emancipate them from the degradation they had been suffering for centuries.

The day chosen by the Guru for the consecration of the temple was the sacred Sivarathri day of 1888. The devotees vied with one another in making the arrangements and in bringing as many articles of worship as they could. By evening, a huge concourse of people had assembled at Aruvippuram, singing devotional songs and intent on keeping holy vigil throughout the night. The Swami had chosen a rock on the eastean side of the river as the alter for the installation of the idol. It was washed clean, and with a lighted lamp before it, it was worshipped with flowers. By midnight, the Gurudev arrived for installing the idol. But where was the idol? People started wondering. As the auspicious moment approached, the Guru stepped into the river for the holy dip and remained plunged in it for a while. It was with a beautiful 'Shivalinga' (symbol of Shiva) in his hand that he came up. In wet clothes and holding the Shivalinga in both hands, Gurudev sat still in meditation for about three hours on the rock chosen for the alter. "Tears flowed down his radiant face. The devotees, standing around the Swami, then began to chant the panchakshara (Namah Shivaya) loudly and fervently. At three in the morning, the idol, washed in holy waters, was installed by the Swami in the temple at Aruvippuram."

This was the prelude to a great socio-religious revolution which was both constructive and peaceful. To have founded a Shiva temple for members of his community at a time when they were prevented from entering or even going anywhere near such a temple, let alone worshipping in it was a big challenge hurled against outworn traditions and the upholders of such tradition. Why, it bewildered the conservatives in the Ezhava community itself. One of them was Cherunelli Krishnan Vaidyar who seriously doubted whether the Guru had the authority of scriptural sanction for installing an idol in a temple. Coming to know of his reaction, the Swami himself went to him and dispelled his doubts and fears.

Nor were Brahmins unconcerned about it. One of them questioned the Guru's action thus "Do the scriptures emjoin the duty of installing the idol of Shiva upon any but the Brahmins?" Without getting offended in the least, Gurudev promptly answered with a smile, "It was not a Brahmin-Shiva but an Ezhava-Shiva that I installed and worshipped." The questioner was stumped.

With the installation of the idol, Sree Narayana's fame spread far and wide in Kerala. People from all over the region poured into Aruvippuram to have a glimpse of him and to worship at the temple founded by him. Gurudev and his devotees were staying in thatched

sheds near the temple. The devotees made several offerings at the temple and saluted the Guru with fervent devotion. It was he who founded a temple where they enjoyed freedom of worship. Is it any wonder therefore that the lower caste Hindus in their millions looked upon him with reverence and awe due to an incarnation of God?

MIRACLES

The consecration of the temple at Aruvippuram thrilled the people as nothing else did. It became the subject of discussion throughout Kerala. Requests came from all over for building temples. This showed that the example set at Aruvippuram had caught the imagination of the people. It started an emotional upsurge which brought on radical social changes. Swami Vivekananda once said that in India even social, political and economic betterment could be brought about only by spiritual motivation. The far-sighted Guru started his social reform work on the same sure foundation of spirituality.

In the same year that the temple at Aruvippuram was consecrated, the Guru built a temple at Vaikkom and dedicated it to the worship of Deveshwar Shiva. It was during his visit to Vaikkom for the inaugural ceremony that the Swami marked out Kumaran who was to be known later as Kumaran Assan.

Kumaran's father, Narayana, was noted for his love of hospitality. His house was situated at a place called Kayikkara. The Swami who had gone there for the consecration ceremony was duly invited by Narayana and taken to his house. It was the Guru's first visit to that house. Kumaran was lying ill at that time but he found no difficulty in conversing with the Swami. The later in the course of his brief conversation with Kumaran he discovered the boy's intelligence and noble character. The Swami who was constantly on the look out for people fit enough to carry on his work saw a worthy disciple in Kumaran. "Are you willing to come away with me"? Asked the Guru. Kumaran gladly agreed. Immediately, turning to Narayana who was standing nearby, the Swami said, "Then, let Kumaran be mine. What do you say, narayana"? The father gave his assent. It is doubtful whether Narayana took this conversation seriously. The Guru then prescribed some medicines to Kumaran, who was destined to be his spiritual son and disciple. Treatment worked. This was the genesis of the life-long relationship between Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Assan.

Though the Swami traveled in many parts of the State for founding temples and other activities, Aruvippuram was his chief place of residence. He worked hard to develop the place on the right lines, for it was Aruvippuram that marked the starting point of his missionary life.

Again, it was during this time that the people came to know of his miracles. He came to be looked upon even as an incarnation of Lord Subrahmanya. Many believed that eating anything given by him would bring a cure of diseases. It was common knowledge that he was an expert mind-reader.

Once a visitor from Kulathoor came to Aruvippuram while the Swami was in conversation with a certain Ummini Assan. The visitor was a notorious miser. The Swami asked him casually whether he was not educating his children. The miser's reply was that he hadn't the money for the purpose. 'Do you have any money with you now?', asked the Swami, to which the miser replied, 'Not a red cent'. Turning to Aasan, the Swami then continued. 'He has money with him now, can you say how much?' Aasan shook his head to say he couldn't. "I can, though", said the Swami. "He had seven rupees when he started from home. He spent two rupees on the way. His purse now contains the balance of five rupees. It was a lie when he said that he was moneyless."

Ummini Aasan found, on verification, that it was quite true. The miser also confessed that what the Swami had said was true.

People had many such stories to tell of the miraculous powers of the Swami. Perhaps it was because of the complete absence of ill-will and other passions in him that even the wild animals never harmed him. The Swami himself narrated an incident once :

"On a furlong-high hill adjacent to the Agasthya ranges and situated near the place where the Aruvippuram temple now stands, I had built a leafy, thatched shed for rest and spiritual practices. While I was staying there, wild animals like tiger and leopard used to pass by occasionally. I had not felt any enmity towards them, nor, for that matter, did I feel that they were wicked and harmful animals. Consequently, there was no feeling of otherness on either side."

One night the Swami was resting inside the shed when a black scorpion stung his leg. He felt a burning sensation in his body from head to foot. He wondered why the scorpion had hurt him, - he had harmed no living creature in his life. With this feeling the Swami looked at the scorpion for one intense moment. Suddenly it was burnt to death. With instinctive sympathy, the Swami exclaimed "What a pity; Your own wickedness brought it on your head- I have done no harm to you. He ruins himself who shows enmity and ill-will to one free from it". The dead scorpion was cremated in sandalwood fire the next morning and the Swami himself immersed the ashes in the river.

This and other similar incidents show the state of sublimity and exaltation that the Swami's mind had soared to a state in which he felt a sense of belonging to all the living things on earth.

The Swami had insisted on the Sanyasins eschewing lust and anger. He, on his own part did not allow such tendencies even to touch him. Once, a bunch of plantains from the compound of the Aruvippuram temple was stolen. At the instance of Kumaran Aasan and others residing there at that time, a suit was filed in the Court with one Sanyasin as the plaintiff. Under order from the court, the accused was arrested with the stolen article. The sentence was to whip the offender tied to a post in front of the temple. The Guru who was in Trivandrum at that time came to know of this when he reached Neyyatinkara. Sad at heart, he said, "I cannot set foot on that impure soil hereafter. If lust and anger are nursed in the hearts of Sanyasins, ere long they will take to stabling and murder among themselves. The air that is polluted by the piteous cries

of that poor man who is to be whipped in front of the temple is not pure for a Sanyasin to breathe. So then, I am going away to some other place.” Accordingly, the Guru avoided going to Aruvippuram and stayed at the residence of a lay disciple at Karimkulam.

“Finally, it was with great difficulty that Kumaran Aasan and others were able to bring him back to Aruvippuram, and that too, on their solemn assurance that the accused would be left off unpunished.”

On another occasion, the priest of the temple complained to the Swami of the theft of jackfruits from the temple compound. The priest hoped that the curse of the Swami would finish off the thief. However, the Swami calmly questioned the priest, “who has done the thieving? Have you seen him later?”

Swami : Plucking of the jackfruits at night is risky. There are prickly thorns around and there may be danger even from snakes. It is better, therefore that they be plucked during daytime. Why did you not speak to the man in this manner? You are of an unsympathetic type. At least from now on, you must be sympathetic and speak to him as I have told you.

This reminds one of the incidents in the life of Sant Eknath, of how the saint, butter in hand, ran after a stray dog that stole his bread for breakfast, calling out, “Here, have this (butter) too, lest you suffer from stomach-ache”.

With the increase in the assets and the income of the Aruvippuram temple, it was found necessary to appoint a manager to look after its affairs. Weavers were settled near the temple and weaving work was started. The Swami encouraged even the neo-literates to teach the illiterates. Never did he allow his monastic disciples to remain idle and inactive. The Swami wanted to start a permanent monastery and school. In 1895, he wrote an appeal for funds and sent it to many sympathizers. He also went on a fund collection tour of the two districts of Karunagappilli and Karthikappilli. With the warm support of several Ezhava houses to his effort, the Swami was able to collect one thousand rupees during the tour.

The Swami then founded an association for the proper management of the temple at Aruvippuram and the properties of the charitable trust. There is an amusing story of how the Swami settled the controversy regarding the order of priority in which the names of share-holders of the association were to be written. Each one insisted on his name being written first and so the issue was taken up before the Swami. He had an easy solution to the problem. He suggested that, instead of the names being written one below the other, they be written one after the other so as to form a circle, in which case nobody would be below or above any other! After this, the share-holders came together, drew up the document agreeing to manage the affairs of the temple amicably and got it registered. The association worked well for about three years. Afterwards in 1903, the famous “Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam” came into being.

Many are the stories told about the Guru's days at Aruvippuram. One year, the people suffered a lot owing to the failure of the Monsoon. In distress they approached the Swami who was doing tapasya at the time. Instantly, he composed a hymn of five verses and asked them to

chant it with heart-felt devotion after bath. They did and, strangely enough, it rained that very day. It is said that on some other occasions too, he had caused rains to fall, once while he was at the Jagannath Temple at Tellicherry and again at another place near Madurai, both in answer to the prayers of devotees.

Kumaran Aasan writes this regarding the miraculous powers attributed to the Swami:

“Gradually, the Swami’s firm continence, religious practices and Yoga began to yield wonderful results. Wherever the Swami went, the people of the locality suffering from incurable diseases like leprosy approached him. And the Swami used to cure them giving a herb or some other thing to eat. People who had suffered for long from fits as also those possessed by ghosts and ghouls got instant and complete relief by a mere look from the Swami. He had exorcised many a ghouls and brought relief to many. Several sterile women belonging to many castes in the Hindu fold had become mothers after receiving his blessings or eating fruits or sweets given by him. The Swami had cured many chronic drunkards of their incurable habit. Those who had taken to drinking in spite of his advice used to retch at the very sight of liquor. Many people, infused with faith in the Swami because of his miraculous powers and pure life, used to take holy vows in his name as before God from which they received benefits such as relief from illness.”

THE GURU AND THE DISCIPLE

In the last chapter, we have already dealt with the first meeting between ‘Kumaran’ and the Guru at which they felt a fascination for each other. Kumaran was in Sree Narayana his Acharya and Ideal in life, the great guide who knew his soul’s anguish and who could bring relief to it. Sree Narayana on the other hand saw in Kumaran an idealist Karma-Yogi who would be his able lieutenant in carrying out the vast and varied activities that formed part of his life’s mission.

Since his first meeting with the Guru, Kumaran began to develop a sense of detachment from his home and family ties. Most of the time, Kumaran could be seen in the company of the Guru, at Aruvippuram. Sometimes they journeyed together somewhere, collecting funds for the development of the Aruvippuram temple. By this process of staying and traveling together, the Guru in course of time instilled in his disciple spiritual thoughts.

It did not take much time for the incipient poetic powers in Kumaran to come under the observation of the Guru. The latter, himself a poet, took particular care in nourishing the gift in his disciple. It is said that soon after the consecration of the Temple at Kolanthumkara, the two together composed a stanza extemporaneously. As soon as the Guru gave the first two lines, Kumaran completed the stanza by composing the next which illustrated the identity of their thought processes.

Most of Kumaran's adolescent efforts were erotic poems. The Guru took great pains to sublimate the muse of his young disciple. He advised him not to write erotic poems. It was the Guru's affectionate guidance and healthy influence that raised Kumaran Aasan to the foremost place among the poets in Malayalam literature. Aasan's works are noted for their loftiness of thought.

The Guru paid great attention to the boy's higher education. He wished to make Kumaran a prime partner in his life's mission by developing the unusual abilities latent in him. In this and other respects the relationship between them can be compared with the one which existed between Sree Ramkrishna and Swami Vivekananda, as noted by several biographers. Sree Narayana, like Sree Ramakrishna, was totally innocent of modern education. Both of them, by their ascetic practices, had attained great spiritual heights. Narendra, however, had already had higher education by the time he met Sree Ramakrishna for the first time. Aasan was not educated so that degree at the time of his coming into contact with Sree Narayana.

The Swami's tours for collecting funds for the Aruvippuram temple and mutt (monastery) continued without a break. In the course of these travel, the Swami with his retinue reached Bangalore where his host was Dr. Palpu. It was here that Kumaran Aasan and Dr. Palpu got to know each other. It was a meeting that produced far-reaching consequences.

The topic of discussion between the Doctor and Gurudev during the latter's stay was naturally the state of deterioration of their community. Dr. Palpu was an enlightened member of the Ezhava community who had always worked whole heartedly for its uplift. Moreover, he had held Sree Narayana Guru in the higher esteem, as the Swami was closely associated with Dr. Palpu's family even from the latter's school going days.

In the course of their conversation, Dr. Palpu spoke of the dearth of men and material for the uplift of the community. The Swami said, "If there are men to work for the cause, there will be no shortage of money. I was convinced of this truth during my travels". "And how will the workers come forward?" Was the Doctor's query. The Swami had firm views on this too: "There must be young men among us who are both educated and responsible. Young men with an aptitude for education must be chosen and educated. What do you say?"

Doctor : I shall gladly meet the expenditure for the education of any one boy.

Swami : (Pointing out Kumaran who was with them) Kumaran richly deserves it. I am sure the

pains you take in educating Kumaran will not go in vain.

The Doctor then and there assumed the responsibility of Kumaran's education.

This was in 1895. Kumaran joined the "Chamarajendra" Sanskrit College and began to read for "Nyaya-Vidwan." The Swami with his retinue continued his journey to place like Chidambaram, Madurai and Tinneveli.

There are no authoritative records giving details of the Guru's first travels in Tamil Nadu. We do not know how long the tour lasted or how many place he visited or the events that took place during these travels. However, it is clear that his travels helped in continuing the work of his mission in later years in several parts of Tamil Nadu. A circle of devotees and admirers gathered around him and followed him wherever he went. Many among them later on became the Swami's disciples.

Gurudev returned from this tour only to start again on his incessant travels. He founded several temples in North and Central Travancore, wherein he performed the ceremony of installing idols.

By now, he came to be known by the name Sree Narayana Guru Swami in place of the old Nanu Aasan which progressively fell into disuse and oblivion. The circle of his admirers that grew up was truly cosmopolitan. This opened the eyes of the Ezhava community which hastened to accept him as its spiritual teacher and social guide. The community was now eager to give a practical shape to his words and even his thoughts. Instead of the old temples wherein inferior gods were worshipped, Siva temples with the noblest forms of worship came into existence. Animal sacrifice as part of the offerings to God was stopped. These were brought about not by the use of force or by making impassioned speeches. Even the utterly illiterate and ignorant people could catch in his simple words and deeds untouched by even a trace of violence or malice-an echo of his heart, throbbing with love and compassion. So, even those directions casually given by him were carried out as his commands. Temples for the worship of inferior gods became fewer among the Ezhavas. On the other hand, temples dedicated to Siva and Subrahmanya grew in number and importance.

It was during this period that the Swami founded 'Kunumpra', or the rock temple at Muttakkad. This temple is situated near Kovalam, south of Trivandrum. Kunnumpara temple excels both Aruvippuram and Sivagiri in natural beauty. This temple dedicated to the worship of Subrahmanya was founded at a place fabled as the spot made sacred by the residence of Masthamalakaacharya. A gentleman by name Chettiarthoppil Kochukkutty Vaidyar made a gift of some landed property to the Swami for the maintenance of temple. Vaidyar also built a mutt near the temple and gifted it to the Swami.

THE CONFLUENCE OF THREE RIVERS

Now we are to enter a very important chapter in the history of modern Kerala. The Ezhavas who led the untouchables among the Hindu society of Kerala, hopelessly divided and disorganized on account of the unscriptural evils, social inequities and unbearable differences between the higher and the lower castes, at last prepared themselves to gather strength through self-reliance and organizational power to face all challenges. It was from this resolve that the historic organization "Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalayanayogam" (SNDP) came into existence on 4th January 1903.

The formation of this organization was not the result of a casual or sudden emotional outburst. It has to be considered as a main link in a chain of events that was long and sidered as a main link in a chain of events that was long and a historical importance. It was the consummation of the efforts of many enlightened souls who sought to remove the humiliations suffered through generations by the untouchable communities of Kerala, especially the Ezhavas.

As it happened, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalanayogam came into being by the coming together of three great souls. Who were they? Which were the main currents in this confluence of three rivers?

First and foremost among them was certainly Sree Narayana Guru himself. We have seen how he achieved the qualities of leadership for the regeneration of his people by an all-round education full of practical wisdom, hard spiritual practices and a thorough knowledge of the ways and conditions of the world gained through extensive wanderings. Besides, he was accepted as an Acharya (preceptor) since the consecration of the Aruvippuram temple. Many other temple consecrations that followed further raised his prestige as a preceptor par excellence.

The second great soul was Dr. Palpu. Dr. Palpu was born in an Ezhava family which, though wealthy; suffered from the social degradation of the community. Although he had acquired higher education, he was not able to secure a job in Travancore, his native place, and hence he was forced to go to Mysore seeking employment there. He could have very easily remained there enjoying wealth and position without being tormented by the caste complex. But the thought about the humiliations and inequities suffered by his people back home in Travancore constantly disturbed him. Dr. Palpu often went to Kerala seeking ways to help them and engaged himself in working out schemes and plans for their uplift. His opinion was that the best remedy was to have a wide network of organization in order to arouse among the members of the community throughout the land a sense of self-respect, community-consciousness and a general awakening.

“Various Ezhava associations were working in Travancore at that time. All those were formed or inspired by one or the other of these three great men Sree Narayana Guru, Dr. Palpu and Paravoor Kesavan Aasan. While he was employed in Mysore, the doctor was often touring Travancore and Cochin in connection with the many affairs of his community. The main purpose of his tour was to enlist people and collect signatures for the ‘Ezhava Memorial’ and to collect funds for sending Barrister C.P. Pillai to England to argue the case of their community. Besides, whenever he came to Kerala on leave he used to tour all over Travancore visiting the prominent person among the Ezhavas and prompting them to organise themselves and raise their voice for securing their rights”.

The third person was Kumaran Aasan. We have already seen hord ‘Kumaru’ as a boy gifted with a rich poetic imagination, had come into contact with Sree Narayana Guru. He grew up, well-equipped to play a leading part in the establishment and steady growth of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalanayogam. Kumaran spent two years in Banglore studying Sanskrit. During that short period itself he greatly impressed his teachers and classmates by his

intelligence and scholarship. But he was not able to continue there for long as Dr. Palpu, who was his parton and only support, had to leave for England. Thus Kumaran left Bangalore without completing his studies at that centre.

For six months thereafter, he stayed in Madras and resumed his studies. He was the guest of Dr. Nanjunda Rao who was a great admirer of Swami Vivekananda. As Kumaran was observing the strict rules of an ascetic at that time and also because he was a disciple of Narayana Guru, he was known among the people as 'Chinna Swamy.'

Kumaran then proceeded to Calcutta for higher studies. In those days Bengal was astir with the national renaissance spirit. The patriotic movements that radiated from Bengal and the speeches and activities of Swami Vivekananda, who had just then returned from his triumphal tour in the West, had made Calcutta the focal point of the whole of India. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Belur Math was then the spiritual headquarter of the country. It was to this city of Calcutta that Kumaran had gone for his higher studies.

He reached Calcutta in 1898. Under a great scholar, Mahamahopadhyaya Kamakhyanatha Tharkavageesa, Aasan read for the 'Tharkatheertha' Examination. Simultaneously he decided to acquire proficiency in the English language. By his earnest and steady efforts he succeeded in that task too. Later he translated some of the important work of Swami Vivekananda into Malayalam for the benefit of his people. Thus, having received the higher education for which he had been sent outside, Kumaran returned to his master ready to work for his mission.

Even though it was with the coming together of those three great personalities that the SNDP Yogam has launched, there was another great soul to be mentioned in this connection, one who indirectly gave the inspiration for a movement of this kind. He was none other than Swami Vivekananda.

Dr. Palpu was a great admirer of Vivekananda. The doctor's biographer describes the relationship between them as follows:

"It was already mentioned that Swami Vivekananda had visited Mysore at the end of 1891 and stayed for one or two days as Dr. Palpu's guest. This meeting with the Swamiji gave him much inner peace. The Doctor made him understand the sufferings of his community as well as his own. He also explained to the Swamiji the humiliations, shackles and insults suffered by untouchables like the Ezhavas in Malabar and by those of Travancore in particular. For example, he pointed out his own experience as well as those of his elder brother, P. Velayudhan. The Swamiji was shown a number of memos received by the members of his community from the Government. They clearly showed that the untouchables were denied not only facilities for education, but also jobs even after they had acquired higher qualifications. Having heard all this, the Swamiji at length suggested. "you must find out a good Sanyasin from your own place and, making him the centre, you should organise the lower communities against the caste system and raise them socially and otherwise. You should agitate against untouchability and similar evils. There is no need to depend on others."

After this meeting, Dr. Palpu occasionally met the Swamiji and continued his contacts with him. This advice of Swami Vivekananda was not forgotten. In fact, it was simmering in his mind all the time. But owing to other preoccupations, he could not take it up seriously till 1903. Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1902 while the whole nation mourned for the great man, Dr. Palpu and Kumaran Aasan felt the loss particularly as he had been an abiding source of inspiration for them in the work they had undertaken. With the help of Kumaran Aasan, the doctor then decided to put into practice the advice of Vivekananda. It was thus that the SNDP Yogam was founded with Sree Narayana Guru as its President.

In 'Sree Narayana Guru Samahara Grantham' P.K. Balakrishnan gives the story as follows :-

"When Swami Vivekananda visited Bangalore, Dr. Palpu felt a great joy in drawing through the streets the rikshaw in which the embodiment of beauty and human greatness had seated himself. He sought the advice of that great soul after giving him a true picture of the sad plight of the Ezhavas of Kerala and the cruel hatred of the higher castes towards them. The Swamiji told him that the only remedy for it lay in organizing the people who were subjected to social slavery and awakening them from inertia. That wonderful soul who had discovered the heart of India could move the hearts of the masses which did not have the sacred halo of spirituality around it. It would not be impossible for them to find out an enlightened spiritual teacher capable of leading such a great movement if they sought one.' It was this advice that brought Narayana Guru Deva and Dr. Palpu together."

P.K. Balakrishnan continues, "Dr. Palpu used to go to Trivandrum frequently to enlighten the Ezhavas of Travancore in those days when the journey from Bangalore to Trivandrum was not easy. He met the Swami (Narayana Guru) in the course of his search for a himself and his movement. The Day they met each other was in every way an auspicious day in the history of Kerala, particularly so for the Ezhava community. Having read the articles of Dr. Palpu, G.P. Pillai and T.M. Nair, and also inspired by the direct exhortation of the doctor, the Ezhavas from different parts of Kerala had begun to join together and clamour for their rights. Now the doctor's attempt was to give these the form of a well-knit organization. Although several attempts had been made earlier to unite the Ezhavas from the various parts of Kerala into one association called the 'Ezhava Mahasabha', none of them had borne fruit. Dr. Palpu, who was not in the habit of losing heart or wavering, thought over the matter calmly. His thoughts turned to the 'Aruvippuram Vavoottu Sabha' which was organized and conducted by Narayana Guru at Aruvippuram. This was how the 'Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam' formerly known as 'Ezhava Mahajana Sabha' had taken its birth ..."

In response to Kumaran Aasan's invitation issued on behalf of Sree Narayana Guru, several prominent men of the Ezhava community from various parts of Kerala assembled at Kamalalaya Bungalow in Trivandrum in December 1902. On that day they resolved to convert the Vavoottu Yogam attached to the Aruvippuram temple consecrated by Narayana Guru into Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam. It was to have its field of work spread all over Kerala. This then was the SNDP Yogam which later grew into a mighty organization.

As already stated, the Presidentship of the Yogam was vested in Sree Narayana Guru himself. Aasan who was residing at Aruvippuram with the Swami after his return from Calcutta was elected General Secretary of the Yogam, which was registered according to the Company Act. He changed his residence to the Yogam office at Trivandrum and immersed himself in the work. Kumaran Aasan was then thirty years old. "Be strong through unity and be free through education!." This was the advice by Sree Narayana Guru to the Yogam and through it to the community at large.

The 'Ezhava Gazette' or 'Vivekodayam', the mouth-piece of the SNDP Yogam, was started in the name of Swami Vivekananda. The press in which it was printed was given the name 'Ananda press.' The 'Saying of Swami Vivekananda' was serially published in 'Vivekodayam.' Aasan in the first issue of 'Vivekodayam', Aasan stated: "The columns of this journal will be often illumined with the most significant essays of the world-famous and adorable personage, Swami Vivekananda, who has become the object of our special gratitude and respect."

Referring to the words of Swami Vivekananda, in one of his moving speeches in Madras, on the importance of a spiritual inspiration for reform movements in India, Kumaran Aasan wrote in the preface to the "Rules and Regulations" published by the SNDP Yogam, thus : "Indian reformers or societies in India could expect nobler advice than these words of Swami Vivekananda." In fact, the preface as a whole bore the impress of the ideas of Vivekananda on the subject of social regeneration.

SOCIAL REFORMER

Even after the establishment of the Yogam, the activities of Narayana Guru continued without any break. He traveled incessantly, consecrating new temples as desired by the devotees and introducing new social customs and conventions suitable to the needs of the times instead of the old and obsolete ones.

The association, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham, proved useful to the Swami to rouse popular opinion against social evils and to introduce new social norms. It was through the medium of his organization that the Swami carried out most of these activities. He used to give his message to the people generally at the meeting of the Yogam. Those ideas would spread among the society through the branches and workers of the association and the people would accept them as a command from their preceptor and put them into practice. The method worked.

The Swami raised his voice against ignorance, laziness and extravagance. He denounced certain meaningless social ceremonies like "Thalikettu" and "Thirandukalyanam" which occasioned the spending of large amounts of money even by those who could ill-afford the expense.

On the 16th of October 1905 a great meeting of the Ezhavas was held at Paravoor near Quilon, which was presided over by Swami. It was an important meeting in the history of the Ezhava community because it was there that he evolved a method for the eradication of harmful social customs such as “Thalikettu” and “Thirandukalyanam” and introduced certain innovations in conducting the marriage ceremony.

The Swami formulated a new way of conducting marriages, which was less expensive but culturally more elevating and significant than the old ceremony traditionally observed in the marriages of the community. This new marriage ceremony conducted before the sacrificial fire with a few essential rites and the chanting of Sanskrit verses was simple and sublime.

According to the new system of marriage introduced by the Swami, there would be a neat and beautiful wedding platform in the middle of which a sacrificial lamp and the ceremonial articles of Ashtamangalyam thrice and garland each other. At the end of the marriage rites, the priest would recite aloud simple and beautiful verses in Malayalam clearly bringing out the significance of those rites. No wonder that the community soon adopted this new system of marriage.

After the meeting at Paravoor, the Swami went on a tour to Thenkasi and other places. Yet he returned in time to participate in the second annual meeting of the Yogam held at Quilon on 7th and 8th of January 1905. A special feature of this annual meeting was that a grand industrial convention was held along with it. The Swami attended the meeting as also the exhibition attached to it. He was taken to the place of the annual meeting was that a grand industrial convention was held along with it. The Swami attended the meeting as also the exhibition attached to it. He was taken to the place of the annual meeting from Varkala in a big procession. The organizers of the Yogam, thinking that it would not be befitting the Swami to participate in that august assembly in his usual dhothi and chaddar, had procured some costly clothes for this use. But the Swami accepting the snow-white silk gown from them, presented it to a tall householder-disciple with a smile. He attended the Yogam in his usual simple dress.

After the meeting Swami gave some directions for the benefit of the preachers who were appointed by the SNDP Yogam for spreading its ideas and ideals. These clearly showed his tactfulness, far-sightedness and maturity of thinking. “Lectures are to be delivered on the following topics which will be conducive to the welfare of the community in general.” TOPICS : Religion, Ethics and Morality; Education and Industry.

Religion :

- A. Discard superstitions and worship of lower deities with animal sacrifices and other inauspicious rites.
- B. Give lectures emphasizing the greatness of the higher modes of worshipping God and the principles of pure Hinduism, the conception of God with and without attributes. Persuade the people to build temples and mutts wherever they demand them. But do not run down other religions in malice or in a way likely cause agitation in the minds of their votaries.

Ethics and Morality :

- A. Truth, Cleanliness, Fear of unrighteousness, faith in God, Unity etc.
- B. Give lectures stressing the necessity of rejecting, as far as practical, the meaningless and Harmful old customs adopting instead civilized and refined ones suitable to times. Guide The people along these lines.

Education :

Inspire the masses by explaining to them the great benefits of education. Point out the evils of ignorance. Create enthusiasm in them so that they may yearn to acquire knowledge and feel that there should not be a single person among the Ezhavas without primary education.

Encourage the people to start schools and libraries wherever necessary with the help of the community or in any other workable way.

Industry :

- A. Give lectures stressing the need for improving in the best possible way agriculture, trade and industry and for practicing economy. Each individual should be made aware that it is a social sin to lead a lazy life. Transform the very nature of the community into one of energy and enthusiastic action.
- B. People should be induced establish industrial institutions wherever necessary. They should feel interested in gaining scientific knowledge about industry and in propagating such ideas among the masses.

No preacher should instruct the people on topics on which he himself is in doubt and misguide them. In matters of customs and practices as also scriptural injunctions, doubts, if any, should be reported to the Swami for solution through the secretary of the association.

The language and tone of the lectures should never be provocative to the so-called high-caste people or causing harm to the low castes. As far as so possible, interest in the welfare of the lower castes should be created in the people.

One of the biographers of the Swami comments on his teaching thus, "The Swami has systematized his model lessons which would uplift mankind through a secular and spiritual life. Those who take up the leadership of men or societies should first of all learn by heart these lessons. Then only should they get into the field of activities. Let them learn carefully the following exhortation of the Swami : "Your speeches on other religions should not be in a provocative or contemptuous manner. It should never cause, in tone or style, any agitation or hurt."

"One must be very careful in approaching the people with any new idea or opinion, however practical or conducive it may be to their welfare. You must enter into such attempts only with the conviction that doing good to the world is your only aim. It will not be wise at all if those who wish to become leaders with the strength of organizations as their back were to disrespect the welfare of the World. Welfare of the world is not an easy thing to be accomplished. In order to

understand or conceive of its greatness and necessity, one should be completely selfless and become interested in the welfare of all beings, Besides, a person must always be thoughtful about the possibility of his action causing harm to others and be quick in avoiding such happenings. He must therefore be able to live with people who appear to be ignorant and uncivilized for the nonce in amity and love.”

The life and teachings of the Gurudeva were the best possible commentary on the verse in the Bhagavad Geeta,

Sakhah Karmanyavidvamso yatha kurvanti Bharata,

Kuryad vidvams tatha saktas hikirshur lokasamgraham.

As the unlearned act from attachment to their work, so should the learned also act, O Bharata (Arjuna), but without any attachment, with the desire to maintain the world-order.

He adopted the method of co-operation to introduce reforms in social customs thereby avoiding friction among the people. It is said in the Geeta. “Whatever the great men do, that the other also do.” The Swami’s policy accordingly was to persuade the higher class men of the society affectionately, yet emphatically, to accept the new customs and put them into practice. He knew that the ordinary people would readily follow the great ones of the society and that the new customs would be adopted happily by them.

The letter which the Swami wrote to Kochu Raman Vaidyar of Cherthalapara in August 1906 is an example in point. It clearly shows how diligently and cautiously he went forward with such reforms in social customs. It runs thus :-

“It is very essential for the welfare of the Ezhava community that there should be a reformation and uniformity in their social customs and practices. For this, the old customs should be reformed or changed according to the present needs of the society, discarding the unnecessary parts and retaining the essential ones. These reforms would be made known to the people by publishing them in the journal ‘Vivekodayam.’ All these are announced according to my wishes. I am immensely happy and gratified to see that good and loving persons in different parts of the country have already begun to accept this new system. I am writing this personally to your noble self as I am informed by the Ezhava Samajam of Karappuram that your noble self will not feel convinced unless you hear from me directly to that effect. I firmly believe that, considering the welfare of the whole society, your noble self also will have faith in these reforms and put them into practice.”

The message sent by the Swami to the SNDP Yogam on 10th May 1909 regarding the external and internal aspects of social reforms is worthy of special attention.

To,

The Secretary, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana YOGAM. It is hereby made known that the following subjects which are useful for the religious and social reformation of our people should be put before the meeting of the Yogam at this session itself and that whatever is needed for implementing them should be done by the association.

Religion : There is widespread enthusiasm in the matter of constructing temples. But it has to be seen whether the aims of these temples are fully realized. The worship of God should reach every home and every heart. Such arrangements should be done as to make the people understand the principles of religion.

1. Arrangements must be made to enlighten people through classes and lectures on our scriptures and through devotional stories-at places attached to the temples wherever possible.
2. In place where this arrangement is not possible, competent preachers must deliver lectures.

Customs : The ceremonies such as 'Thirandukuli' and 'Pulikutu' are now being observed without festivities and expenditure. However, the advice to stop the 'Thalikettu' though accepted by many, has not spread everywhere uniformly.

1. Steps should be taken to root out this ceremony from everywhere as soon as possible.
2. The new system of marriage ceremony is found adopted only in some places among some civilized sections of the community. Although the rites and pomp of the marriage might differ according to the financial conditions of the people, the main features of it should be uniformly observed in all places and the Yogam must do whatever necessary for this purpose.
3. At the time of marriage, when the couple garland each other, it is good to tie round the neck of the bride a 'Thali' which indicates marital relationship. But in the person of the woman getting remarried there must not be anything of a token of remembrance of the husband who might have either died or divorced her. So those who remarry should not wear the 'Thali' of their first marriage at the time of remarriage or thereafter. My views on divorce and remarriage, I shall state decisively and in detail on the next occasion.
4. Polygamy and polyandry are found in vogue in certain place. We must think over this matter. This custom must not be allowed to continued freely in future.
5. There must be some legal provision for the legally married wife and children of a person following 'Marumakkthayam' among us to inherit at least a portion of his personal property. If it is not so, marriage will be meaningless. We have to consider this problem too and find out a solution for it in due course.

In a message sent on 31st August 1909, after stressing the necessity for instructing the people about the principles of religion, of the value of internal and external purity, of education and of the qualities such as non-violence, love and unity, the Swami added :

“You must select young men who have an aptitude for service and train them as Brahmacharins. Give Sanyas to those worthy Brahmacharins who are desirous of it. They should then be sent out to work for the welfare of others.”

We can see from this that during this period he had begun to ponder over the necessity of moulding real Sanyasins who would be fit to achieve the purpose of his vast and varied activities which he had already started.

He not only propagated the reformist principles but on certain occasions also directly prevented undesirable practices by his loving words and sweet compulsion. An incident which took place on 18th January 1911 is worthy of special mention here.

“The great Swami, always interested in the welfare of the community, arrived at the time of the auspicious occasion of marriage (on that day). In the large lavishly decorated pandal were seated the well-adorned and beautifully-dressed girls ready with all arrangements for ‘Thalikettu’ in the midst of band and music and other pomp and show. All the prominent men from South Travancore were present. Important Nairs of the locality and even distinguished persons from the Christian and Muslim communities had been invited. The house, the compound and neighbouring house were crowded with people not only because of the prospect of a grand feast. When the Swami came to the scene even as Sree Krishna entered the Kaurava assembly, various were the feelings aroused in the minds of the people there. But none could remain without offering respectful greetings to that spiritual personage. Calling to his side the master of the house who was the father of the leading girl, the Swami said :

“This Kettu Kalyanam ceremony is unnecessary. It is a pity that in spite of my repeated advice, none of you has paid sufficient heed to my words so far. It is for your good that I am telling this. If you have faith in my words, you must give up this ceremony.”

Householder : Whatever be your command I am ready to obey. I promise that we will not conduct ‘Kettu Kalyanam’ in our family hereafter.

Swami : That won’t do. Why can’t you cancel even this ceremony if you agree that it is unnecessary? It is meaningless. There will be no harm if you cancel it.

Householder : I am quite willing to obey Swamiji’s command.

Swami : You consent wholeheartedly; don’t you ? This is enough.

Then he called the other guardians of the girl and talked to them in similar fashion. All of them agreed to do what he commanded. A word about the householder’s wife deserves to be specially mentioned here. She did not show the slightest unwillingness to put an end to the ceremony at the eleventh hour without the ‘Thalikettu’ rites being performed, although it was begun in a grand manner. And the girl was her only daughter. Far from expressing any regret or resentment, the noble lady was full of respect and praise for Swamiji’s command aimed at the welfare of the whole community.

The revered Swami then called the girls sitting in the pandal ready for the 'Thalikettu' ceremony to his side and gave them each with his own hands some fruits and flowers. They were then sent inside the house. Swami then ordered a man standing beside him to announce to the assembled gathering in a firm and clear voice that he had abrogated the ceremony and that it was his desire that this unnecessary custom should not be observed by anybody among their community thereafter. The man announced it as ordered and all the people assembled there accepted it in wonder, respect and devotion. Thus a grand 'Thalikettu' ceremony was stopped at the pandal itself."

This incident took place in the house of a very rich man at Karimkulam, Neyyatinkara. When we think of the Gurudeva who accomplished this act just by his power of command born out of austerities and purity of purpose, thus avoiding unnecessary agitation or commotion, resentment or hatred, we are reminded of Lord Tarthagatha who, entering the sacrificial hall of King Bimbisara, released and saved the goats which were kept tied for slaughter and, at the same time, by his gentle but firm words, brought a change of heart in the king.

On another occasion, the Swami wrote a letter to M. Govindan forbidding the 'Thalikettu' ceremony which he had decided to conduct for his girls according to the old custom. Govindan promptly gave up the idea in obedience to the Swami's wishes. Thus gradually that meaningless and expensive old custom was completely eradicated from the community.

The attempt of the Swami was to make the people give up those superstitions and social customs which were obsolete and irrational, and unhelpful in raising the individual and society culturally. Instead, he wanted them to accept such modes as were suitable to the time and place, which helped the individual and society in their cultural uplift and unity. His method was not to reject anything altogether but to persuade the people to adopt higher and greater things. No society can do without some customs and conventions. But according to the changing conditions of life, modifications in the social conventions are inevitable. The Swami was fully conscious of this and he offered the Ezhava community a new code of conduct in keeping with the present age. This 'Achara Samhita' (code of conduct) known as 'Sree Narayana Smriti' was formulated according to the instructions of the Swami. The Smriti fully reflected his authoritative ideas and opinions. The Guru desired to unite the community and raise their cultural level through the observance of this new code of conduct. In laying down a new Dharma Samhita or Smriti for the new age in Kerala, Sree Narayana only followed the ancient tradition of India-the making and unmaking of the laws of social life by the great Rishis for the welfare of mankind, from age to age. The new rituals and ceremonies that he introduced were simple as well as striking-a harmonious blend of Sanskrit Mantras, Vedic thoughts and Tantric rites, they were designed to raise the aesthetic and cultural senilities of the community.

The Swamigal was an ideal to all-as a social reformer as also in the matter of building temples. The growth of the temples was arrested to the extent that they were unable to fulfil the needs of the modern age. They had sunk to such a level that they became shelters of superstitions and corrupt practices. Consequently, instead of feeling an attraction and adoration, the people were beginning to show aversion and hatred towards the temples. Even the notion that temples were unnecessary became prevalent. But the Swamigal like an expert psychiatrist, diagnosed the

disease and prescribed the right remedy. Annihilating the disease, he saved the patient. The conversation between the Gurudeva and the editor of a newspaper regarding temples proves this point.

Editor : Now, the majority of people are of opinion that temples are not necessary.

Swami :How can you say that it is not necessary ? You have to keep the temples neat and clean. Good thoughts would arise when the devotees go there after a good bath. In temples, pure air can be breathed. Some observe fasts in temples and gain health for body and mind. Some have their desires fulfilled due to faith. It all depends on the belief of the people. Are these not beneficial ? Temples are necessary.

Editor : The objection is to the worship of idols. It creates superstitions.

Swami : When the devotees enter the temple there is no thought about the idols at all. They believe in God. (smilingly). They will be reminded of the idol only if people like you tell them about it. All worship God, not the idols.

Pointing to the temple, he proceeded : "You must grow (flower) gardens around the temple. Good varieties of trees also should be planted and platforms in bricks should be built around them, where people could sit and enjoy fresh air. There must be good libraries attached to the temples. Collect all religious books and teach the people. Let the temples be. If the surroundings are kept neat and clean and beautiful, people will go there. It will arouse good thoughts in them and their health also will improve. Temples are necessary. You should maintain them in the proper manner, that is all. Do you know how many stay in the Sivagiri temple and return cured of their diseases? By bathing, meditating and breathing pure air, you will indeed get rid of all diseases. All have temples. Who does not have them?"

All the temples built by the Swami are founded on those ideas and ideals. The site selected for building temples, the method of construction, the system of worship there, all these serve as a model not only to the people of Kerala but to the whole of India. The Gurudeva's service in this field will surely be admired and emulated by one and all.

SIVAGIRI

Social reform and construction of temples progressed simultaneously. Just within a month of the establishment of the SNDP Yogam, the Swami consecrated the Moothakunnam temple.

On his way to the temple, he was accompanied by Sri Chattampi Swamikal and Kumaran Aasan. On his return, he stayed at Cherayi for a day in January, 1903 (Makaram), with Sri Ayyappan was a small boy then. Achuthan, his elder brother was devotee of Vaidyan Swami

and Chattampi Swamikal and a friend of Sri Kumaran Aasan. It was Ayyappan's first meeting with Narayana Guru.

In 1904, the Gurudeva came across the Varkala hills. Instantly he was drawn to the hills as he adored the beauty of nature. He frequented the place since. Sri Moorkoth Kumaran, his biographer, writes, "The Swamikal built a hut on the hills, stayed there and raised various crops in the nearby areas. Knowing that the Swami was resting on the Varkala hills, people began to throng the place. In course of time, His Holiness took that hill on lease from the Government. The adjacent areas were offered to the Swamikal as gift by their owners. After that he decided to build a temple and a Mutt there. Varkala is a sacred place known from olden days as Dakshina Kasi, or the Varanasi of the South. A large number of Ezhavas used to gather on the beach at Varkala on the new moon day in the month of Karkitakam to perform Sraddha. In that year, it was laid down that all members of the community should assemble at the Swamiji's Mutt on the new moon day which fell on August 12, and not on the beach as hitherto. The Ezhavas assembled at the Mutt from where they performed Sraddha according to scriptural injunctions under the direction of the Swami's disciples."

After leaving Aruvippuram, the Swami chose Varkala as the main centre of his activities. He decided to develop that place as his headquarters. Aruvippuram is situated at the farthest end of the State and far from the main traffic routes. But Varkala was close to Travancore and well-connected by road. In natural beauty and availability of water, Varkala was not behind Aruvippuram. Though there is no river, Varkala is noted for its numerous spots.

Soon afterwards, Varkala became the Gurudeva's place of residence. Wherever he went, it was to Varkala that he returned. "Swami is now residing at Varkala, having left Aruvippuram after the 'Shivarathri' day. He is setting up a Mutt on the hill near the famous Varkala tunnel. He has built a large farm around the hill. His idea is to make the Mutt a permanent monastery and to return to Aruvippuram only after the 10th of Edavam."

Varkala was not a thickly populated area. Amidst the green vegetation on the mountain slopes were hard and black rocky reefs with their upraised heads. Those inclined to a life of ease, had left this place for the coasts where fertile soil, fish and water were in plenty. The Gurudeva had chosen this hill, away from the trials and tribulations of everyday life, 'far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife.' On this isolated spot, he saw noble expressions of sublime beauty. His meditative eyes could perceive the tenets of change and evolution hidden behind those sturdy rocks. The ever-blowing wind which rose from the wide breast of the distant ocean caressed him in the dark. The starlit nights became musical with the murmur of the far away waves. The perennial springs playing hide-and-seek with patches of green turned into singing rivulets as they gurgled along rocky layers. Human eyes, vitiated by greed and haste, could never appreciate the unspolited beauty of this place. But not the Guru. He used to speak of Varkala thus :-

Varkala was not a populous place. The blackened rocks that cut into the greenness of the sloping hills, looked hard and unyielding. The seekers after ease and pleasure had therefore deserted this place and lived nearer the sea-coast where the abundance of fish, moisture and fertility favoured the proliferation of human life." Away from the competition and strife of daily life

the Guru sat on the hill-top, removed, from the highways of business. To him the neglected spot had its aspects of sublime beauty. Hidden behind the apparently unchanging fixity of the rocks, the meditative eyes of the Guru could see the principle of change and becoming. The ancient breezes that rose far away on the ocean's breast, greeted him where he sat. The starlit nights were rich with the distant murmur of the waves. At the root of the barren rocks, hidden amongst the growth of fern, crystal springs perennially formed themselves into gurgling streams. The virgin beauty of the spot could not be discovered by the vulgar eye of haste or greed. To the Guru, as he himself used to say, it was the "Punya Bhoomi" (holy land), where the signs of human pettiness and greed were not in evidence."

Sivagiri was the name given to the Varkala hills. He built a Siva temple there. But more prominent there is the Sarada Mandiram, which he founded later. The Sarada idol is the symbol of a new aspect, different from and nobler than all the deities previously installed by the Gurudeva. The installation ceremony took place in May (Medam) 1912, coinciding with the ninth annual convention of the SNDP Yogam held at Sivagiri.

The Sarada temple at Sivagiri is a characteristic one. In all the temples built by the Swami the *uttama* mode of worship (as practiced by Brahmin priests) was being followed. Food offerings, festivities etc., common to the *uttama* mode of worship were observed in all these temples. But actually this is not the highest form of worship. By the consecration of the Sarada Mandiram, the Swami signified a model of the loftier form of worship. The Sarada Mandiram is an exquisite octagonal structure, with colour-stained glass windows. The brickwork is smooth and attractive. The deity, Goddess Sarada, is seated on a lotus. Instead of the customary practices, the devotees recite hymns and meditate.

Besides the Sarada Mutt, the Gurudeva established an English school and a Sanskrit school at Varkala. In 1904, he built the Sree Somasekhara temple at Peringottukarar as also the Anchu Thengu temple.

Sivagiri, the captivating hill, also salubrious with its fresh water and pure air, became a pilgrimage centre for the devout. In latter years, it was here that Narayana Guru received Mahatmaji and Tagore. His disciples arranged for an annual Pilgrimage to Sivagiri in the month of Dhanu (January 1st), beginning in 1928. Ever since there has been a regular stream of the faithful wearing yellow robes and undergoing self-imposed physical restraints to Sivagiri for the Dhanu festival. This festival has come to stay forming part of Kerala's rich and colourful cultural tradition.

The Swami had very clear and firm ideas about what should be the purpose of the Sivagiri pilgrimage. He laid down before the pilgrims definite social and economic aims. He said : "The purpose of the pilgrimage to Sivagiri, the objectives-its aims-should be : (he counted them on his lefthand fingers) One, Education; Two, Hygiene; Three, Devotion to God; Four, Unity; Five, Agriculture; Six, Trade; Seven, Cottage industry and Eight, Technical skills. Do you follow these points? A series of lectures should be conducted on these subjects. Persons proficient in these subjects should be invited to deliver lectures. People should listen with care and attention and try to put them into practice upon which the people and the country will prosper. This should be the target of the Sivagiri pilgrimage. Do you understand?"

It can be said with certainty that the pilgrimage has succeeded in achieving this in a praiseworthy manner.

TO GOKARNAM

The activities of the Swami in Malabar constitute the most brilliant and proud chapters in the history of Hindus, especially of the Ezhavas of that area. The Ezhavas of Malabar, as elsewhere in Kerala, were a decadent society, having accomplished historical feats of valour and patriotism. It was at such a juncture that the news about the Gurudeva's great contribution to the progress of the community through social reform and temple construction began to spread in Malabar. Naturally there was a desire among prominent Ezhavas to invite the Gurudeva to build temples in Malabar. Consequently, Malabar happened to be blessed with the Gurudeva's visit and the other benefits flowing from it.

In 1908 when the Swami was resting at Sivagiri, a delegation waited on him to invite him to Malabar.

Rarichan Moopan of kallingal Matham, C. Krishnan, Editor of 'Mitavadi' and others were among those on the delegation. They expressed a desire to build a Siva temple at Calicut and implored him to oblige them.

The Swami accepted the invitation and proceeded to Malabar soon after. But by the time they reached Alwaye, the Swami and some of his disciples were down with a severe attack of cholera. Their condition became critical. One of the disciples died there. A famous doctor, Sri Thampi, who examined the Swami spared no pains to save him. Gradually, the critical moments passed and he felt a little better. For further treatment and convalescence, Narayana Guru and his disciples went to Palghat. They reached Palghat on Nov. 26, 1908 and stayed at Dr. Krishnan's bungalow.

Meanwhile, Dr. Krishnan convened a meeting of prominent Ezhavas of the locality on the third and fourth of December. The meeting decided to construct a temple at Palghat for the prosperity of the community and freedom of worship. Soon fund collection started. When he regained health, the Swami laid the foundation stone of the Kannampariyaram Paramba in Yakkare where the temple is now situated. It was on the fifth of Dhanu.

While the Swami was resting at palghat, some Ezhava leaders of Tellicherry met him and invited him to visit that place. Among them were Ramunni Vakil, K. Krishnan Govindan Sirasthedar, He promised to visit Tellicherry when health permitted.

Preparations for the construction of a temple at Tellicherry had begun much earlier. Sri Kumaran Aasan had gone there in July 1905 at the instance of the Swami and the invitation of Varavoor Kaniyil Kunjhikkannan and others had formed an association called the 'Sri

Jnanodaya Yogam' as a preliminary step. Subsequent work was carried out under the auspices of this association.

The Swami left Palghat and reached Calicut on Dec. 23 to an unprecedented and fantastic welcome. Members of the Theosophical Society called on him the next day. Many of them were Brahmins. On 26th Dhanu, he performed the 'Bhoomipuja', of the temple at Calicut. He was taken to the spot from the house of Rarichan Moopar in a palanquin at the head of a procession of caparisoned elephants and to the accompaniment of drums, cymbals and flutes. On the 29th, the Theosophical Society accorded a reception and presented an address of welcome to him at the Society hall. Sri Kumaran Aasan replied to the welcome address.

The Swami took an active interest in the construction of the temple. The Sanctum sanctorium of the Sreekanteswara temple had been built on the model and to the scale of that in the Pazhani temple. A disciple, Chaithanya Swamikal was sent to Pazhani especially for obtaining data on the scale and model of the shrine and it was after that, that the construction of the temple was begun.

After the Bhoomipooja of the temple at Calicut, the Swami and his entourage, accompanied by the elite of the town left for Tellicherry by the mail train. The next Saturday he inspected the workspot of the temple and expressed satisfaction. Thereafter, he proceeded to Cannanore. As a result of his visit, an association under the name of "Bhagavad Bhakthipradeepa Yogam" was formed with Sri Cheruvari Karunakaran as its president. The mainstay behind the fund drive was this Yogam. The site where the temple at Thalappadi now stands was selected by the Swami. When he visited the place, he remarked, "An excellent spot!"

In January 1908, His Holiness performed the Bhoomipuja of the Sundareswaran temple at Cannanore. Then he started for Mangalore at the request of the Thiyyas of Thulu Nadu who were known as Villevars. There also he prepared the groundwork for the construction of a temple.

On his way back from Mangalore, he installed the idol in the Jagannatha temple at Tellicherry. Opinion was sharply divided among the Ezhavas on allowing Harijans into the temple. One group under Moorkoth Kumaran and others advocated the Harijans' cause. The Swami's tactful and persuasive manner won the day and Harijans were allowed into the temple.

The Sree Kantheeswaram temple was consecrated on May 11, 1910. He arrived by train at Calicut the previous night, accompanied by Kumaran Aasan and other disciples. Arrangements were made for his stay at the Vaidika Mutt to the east of the temple.

The Sivalinga was brought to the temple in a big procession. It was a grand pageant with regalia splendour and pomp. Every Hindu without any distinction of caste, worked hard for its success. When the procession with the chariot borne linga reached the temple, the authorities of that temple offered arati before the chariot. The procession moved on to the Varkala beach where the Sivalinga was bathed in the sea. The procession then wound its way back to the temple where the linga was kept immersed in water (Jaladivasam) for the whole night. A sea of humanity converged on the temple precincts by the small hours of the installation day. As the

auspicious moment for the installation drew near, the swami and his disciples had their ablutions and donned lily-white robes. During the last “Yama” (quarter) of the night, at about 5.30 in the dawn, the Gurudeva installed the Sivalingam in the temple. Afterwards, idols of Subramania, Ganapathy and Sastha were installed. Sri Chaithanya Swami performed the “Ashtabandha Prathistha” etc., as directed by the Guru. By day-break on Thursday, all ceremonies were over under sublime auspices. The Swami’s face lit up with a smile as he came out of the temple. ‘Everything all right,’ he said.

The temple was called Nalleswaram temple in the beginning. It is said that formerly, there was a temple by that name on that site. After the Swami’s return to Aruvippuram, he wrote back saying it should be named Sreekanteswaram temple.

In April 1916, the Swami consecrated the Sundareswaram temple at Cannanore.

In January 1911, he installed the idol in the big temple belonging to the Vijnana-Vardhini Sabha at Pallippuram. In his reply to the welcome address by the association he gives us a new angle of his vision. It runs thus: “There are very few people in our community who have had higher education. In recent years, however, some members of the community are seen showing interest in having higher education. It certainly gives me great joy. If we sincerely aspire for the welfare of our community, we should try to spread education among its members, as education is a factor leading every society to prosperity. Everyone may not find it easy to pass higher examinations. Hence, those who are in a comparatively easy financial position should take an interest in educating the poor and the intelligent students, even sending them to other places for higher education. If you do so, it will be conducive to the welfare of our community in many ways. The importance of Sanskrit education is decreasing day by day. Now, English is more popular. Hence we have to turn our attention to acquiring proficiency in it. Not only men, but also women should be educated. We should not let them lag behind in these matters.

“Next to education, the factor conducive to the prosperity of the community is promotion of industries. The financial condition of our community is very poor. Economic improvement will not be possible unless there is development of industries. So, well-to-do people have to take an interest in this matter as well. It is possible only for the rich to invest money in buying various kinds of machines required for running industries. If a single individual is unable to undertake such things, you should boldly come forward, jointly to form a company, if necessary. Although there are various avenues open towards prosperity, the members of our community do not dare use them. Raw materials like copra, fibre etc., which are available in plenty here are being exported now and the end-products manufactured there are bought by us at a very high price. We are compelled to do so just because we do not know the manufacturing processes. To find out a remedy to this, we should send our children for industrial training to such establishments. This also is the duty of the well-to-do- members. Besides, every member of the community should have at least primary education.

“Literary associations and libraries should function in every locality as they help much in educating the people. Each member of the community should try his best to develop them. It would not be befitting them, if the so-called rich people keep silence in these matters.

"In any case, I hope that you will show greater enthusiasm in your sincere endeavours in this regard and that your aim will be happily realized in the near future."

THE PRECEPTOR OF ADWAITA

After the establishment of the Sarada Mutt at Sivagiri, the Guru's attention turned to Alwaye. From Varkala he traveled to the northern parts of Kerala. He was now well known from Kanyakumari to Mangalore. A large section of people accepted him as their preceptor. The Guru naturally felt that as far as possible, he should shift the centre of his activities from south Travancore to central Kerala.

But this journey was not one of distance alone. The Guru's journey from Aruvippuram towards the bank of Alwaye river through Varkala symbolizes also the stages for progress in man's spiritual pilgrimage. To quote Sri Nataraja Guru :

"The essential mystic experience of the Guru had passed through various phases by this time. It had taken the form of supplication and melting devotion of the most unconsolable type while he performed Tapas on the banks of the torrent river at Aruvippuram. At Varkala the emotions had become softer and more tender. The kind Mother was the ideal of the soul, and he was the child seeking consolation in the thought of the Mother. As the pearly nautilus changes its cell, he had outgrown these earlier stages and left them behind.

The Guru, rapt in meditation in the little thatched hut on the banks of the Alwaye river was not merely a devotee. In the words of the writer just quoted, "It would be vain to attempt to record here even a little of the nature of the state which he thus again entered. As he sat in the calm, strength gained through years of Tapas, Time's narrow limits shrank within him, bringing to his ken the vast expanse of years. Ancient and immemorial truths, that have there being in regions far away, dawned upon him, making the present consciousness radiant with a brilliance beyond words,"

Even during his first journey to Malabar, the Guru's eyes had turned to the beautiful banks of the Alwaye river. Soon after the consecration ceremony at Sivagiri, his main interest lay in the founding of the Adwaita Ashram at Alwaye. Starting from Varkala, the Guru arrived at Karthikappally, where he chanced to discuss the matter with a householder devotee. The dialogue between them has been recorded as follows :-

Devotee : May I know the mission of Swamiji's unannounced visitation now ?

Guru : There-at Varkala-it is all entrusted to them, you know. Now they'll look after everything. We must have a place to live in.

Devotee : Any place that suits Swamiji's pleasure. There shall be no difficulty in that matter.

Guru : Always seems all right !

Devotee : But money is the problem. Property has to be bought at a very high price.

Guru : Isn't the world full of money? Where is the difficulty? In fact, the only difficulty is that there is no one to buy the property.

Devotee : I shall come forward.

Guru : Then, the deal is as good as made.

Within two weeks of this conversation, the Guru reached Alwaye. Several devotees and admirers, by that time, had collected the money to buy the property. The land the Swamiji had planned belonged to a Cochin businessman. He met the businessman and purchased the land on which stands the present Adwaita Ashram of Alwaye.

The primary aim of the Adwaita Ashram, as the Guru had envisaged it, was to teach, propagate and make man live by the doctrine of Adwaita. He toiled for establishing institutions for this purpose of enforcing a life of spiritual discipline. The starting of a school which would adequately work out his idea of education based on Adwaita was the first to engage his attention. An educational institution imparting Sanskrit education according to the Gurukula system gradually became popular. Provision was made for learning English also. Without any distinction of caste, students lived and studied together there. In the morning they would bathe together in the Alwaye river, pray together and eat together. Caught in the magnetic field of the high ideals the institution stood for, they began to shine in ever-increasing measure. It was to develop such an institution as would stress the practical application of the doctrine of Adwaita that the Guru had longed for and laboured.

The study of Sanskrit was given the place of pride in the Adwaita Ashram School. Like a mother bringing up her children with loving care and filial affection, the Guru's entire attention was focused on the progress of the Sanskrit School. He earnestly desired that the pupils should grow in unique atmosphere of Sanskrit culture. When the teacher took the attendance the students should respond 'Asmi' or 'Aagathosmi'. He was very particular that paper-reading and speeches made at student's assemblies should be entirely in Sanskrit. Commenting on his love of Sanskrit on the part of the Guru, Sri Nataraja Guru writes thus :-

"Of all the channels through which ancient thought reached the masses of India, the fountain source was the Sanskrit language. This was the tongue that had preserved, recorded in the form of inflections and sounds, and epitomized in symbol, the best thoughts of the ages. From the ancient chant that burst from the lips of our early ancestors, when the disc of gold that hid the face of Truth was removed to reveal to them their first surprises, Sanskrit culture and flowed through regions enriched by the writings of great minds like Vyasa, Valmiki and Kalidasa, and at the present day it continues kindle, in the heart of the modern votary of this mother of languages, rich and ancient emotions. Spurred by the sounds, the human spirit soared at its noblest and highest. Sanskrit combined the primitive and the pure into one magic spell.

“This was the source to which the Guru turned to bring fresh life and reopen the weak eyelids of the people. At the time of his advent this great river that had nourished the spiritual life of the whole population for many thousands of years, was all but absorbed completely in the sand of its bed, like some of the holy rivers of South India. The once rich tributaries of patronage that this culture enjoyed, stood overdrained. Sea-borne influences shook and distorted its quiet growth. It was mere the shell or bark of the culture that remained, and the votaries of Sanskrit worshipped the forms and formalities of its dead relics rather than lived in the spirit of its culture. The Sanskrit schools, instead of reviving in the pupil the purest memories of the past, had become degraded into institutions where the ancient chants and formulae were repeated parrot-like. They turned out men to whom holiness was a profession and whose other-worldly absorption was strangely waters of petty utilitarianism had contaminated the once pure and healthy springs which had their origin deep in the rock bottom of the past. The problem was to rid the nourishing source of the contaminating influence and to draw only the purest. The Guru showed how this could be done.”

The aim of the Adwaita Ashram was not only to copy out Adwaitic thoughts but also to translate their experience into life. The atmosphere there was such as promoted the complete avoidance of caste-consideration and enabled the high-caste and the low-caste Hindus to behave like brothers born to the same parents. Even while clamouring for equality of status with the high-caste Hindus, the Ezhavas and others were not prepared to live on a footing of equality with those whom they considered inferior to themselves. The swami took Harijan boys also as boarders in the Ashrams. He also made them cook food for the guests and others. Whenever a few prominent caste-conscious Ezhavas came to the Adwaita Ashram, Pulayas used to serve food to them. Nay, the Swami even introduced the servers to them telling that they were Pulayas.

It was usual to arrange cosmopolitan dinners in the Ashram on many occasions. Many prominent persons of the high-castes used to participate in them, though half-heartedly. Sri Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai describes one such occasion. He was then the English teacher of the school attached to the Ashram. The Ashram authorities had invited him to participate in a cosmopolitan dinner. It has been recorded that the Swami meaningfully asked Sri Kuttipuzha squatting and eating his food from a leaf along with people of different castes and religions : “Has everything disappeared? Has all caste consideration completely gone ?” He replied in all humility that even the little stain of caste-consciousness left in the mind had been wiped off. One also hears that Swami’s spiritual power exerted such an influence even on aristocratic Brahmins as to compel them to sit with the low caste people and to partake of the cosmopolitan dinner.

The fact that the Ezhavas, extremely angered by the injustice shown to them by the high-caste Hindus, adopted the same cruelty towards communities just inferior to them in the caste-ladder, painted the Swami very much. He was firm that unless they made amends for it, they had no right to clamour for justice. Hence he told them : “You must look upon Pulayas and the like with love. The Ezhavas should behave towards their inferior in such a way that those who deem themselves superior to the Ezhavas should see and learn from it. This is a matter you should pay special attention to.”

The Swami considered his efforts to uplift communities like the Pulayas without any fanfare as part of his life's mission. At a meeting in August 1915 (Chingam) held at the primary school in the Ashram of Sri Sreedharam Swami of Perungala which he visited, the Swami called the seven Pulaya students of that schools and made them sit in front of the platform. Beckoning to each of them to his side to gave them sugar with his holy hand and lovingly advised them to be neat and clean and to study with keen interest. Looking at one of those boys, he asked the teacher, "He seems to be an intelligent boy, doesn't he?" The teacher nodded assent. The Swami then called the boy to his side and asked him to make a speech as well as he could. The boy's brief oration delighted the Swami very much. After the meeting, he took the boy with him and had light refreshments at the residence of Sri Purushothamman of Arikkara.

The Swami taught these lessons not through speeches and propaganda but through the manner and example of his own Life. Hence left a deep impression on the minds of others.

It was not uncommon in those days for the Ezhavas to take sides with the caste Hindus to harass Pulayas whenever quarrels arose between caste Hindu and Pulayas. This attitude of the Ezhavas deeply painted the Swami. About this time, one such incident took place at Neyyatinkara. There was a fierce clash between Nayars and Pulayas. A few Ezhavas joined hands with Nayars against the Pulayas. Sri Ayyankali the leader of the Pulayas, met the Swami and apprised him of these developments. The Swami summoned the prominent Ezhavas of Neyyattinkara and advised them to help the Pluyas openly and solidity in all activities meant for their uplift.

It was not an easy job for the Swami to prepare the minds of Ezhavas to eat with Pulayas and others and to grant them entry into their temples. For instance some of the prominent Ezhavas in Tellicherry refused to admit Pulayas to the Jagannatha temple there. Following that, there arose a fierce clannish feud. The problem could not be solved even with the Guru's intervention. He desired a peaceful solution without magnifying disunity. Hence he suggested a line of demarcation up to which Pulayas could go for the time being. This was acceptable to all concerned. Later on it was laid down that Pulayas could enter the temple once a moth. On a later occasion, Pulayas entered the temple in the presence of the Swami. Singing 'Bhajan' they went round the temple and offered grapes and sugar candy to the Swami. The guru distributed those offering of the Pulayas to all those assembled there. Full of delight, few Pulayas prostrated before him. The Guru's compassionate eyes filled with tears. From that unforgettable day onward, Pulayas too enjoyed the freedom of entry into the Jagannath temple.

The GURU'S SHASHTIABDA POORTY :

THE DISCIPLE'S MARRIAGE

The Swami was staying in the Adwaita Ashrama in August 1916(chingom). His disciples and followers under the impression that his 60th birthday fell during that year had arranged for a celebration of the event on a magnificent scale. However owing to the Swami's intervention, it was gone through at Always on a nominal scale. The Swami

also declared that his 60th birthday was over long ago. And it was true too. It was found out that the Swami had completed 60 years two years earlier.

Nevertheless, a number of disciples and devotees from different parts of Kerala arrived at the Ashram that morning to pay their respects to the Swami and to wish him long life. After finishing his morning bath in the Alwaye River and his meditation as usual, the Swami gave 'Dharshan' to all of them with a beaming face. They placed at his feet grapes; sugar candy, fruits and other offerings. The Swami distributed them among the audience. His disciples worshiped their Guru with flowers and garlands. Seeing a few gold flowers amidst them, the Guru remarked with a smile; "There are, I notice, a few flowers which have no fragrance!"

But in other places, his 60th birthday was celebrated with pomp. Of these celebrations the one that acquired the greatest importance was the inauguration of the Sree Narayana Shasthiabda Poorty Memorial Building in Travancore. The day was celebrated with great fanfare not only in districts like South Canara, Madura and Thirunelveli outside Kerala and in big cities like Madras, Calcutta, but also in foreign countries like Ceylon, Singapore, etc. this could be considered a measure of the wide area where the guru's fame had spread.

Another episode to be mentioned is the wedding of Sri Kumaran Aasaan in 1918. It was a totally unexpected event. Aasaan was 45 years old man. It was not after consulting the Guru and getting his permission that Aasaan had fixed the wedding. Aasaan informed the Guru of the matter after taking the decision himself. Aasaan drew the Guru's attention and sought his permission for the marriage through four beautiful Sanskrit verses. One of them reads as follows:-

"Though I had this informing thee, I pray for thy approval of this decision of mine. Verily, this is my first prayer to thee made with folded hands and head bowed in devotion."

The Guru was staying in the Adwaita Ashram of Alwaye when he got the telegram about the marriage. The Guru enquired about the details of the message which was in English and he understood the situation clearly. But his reaction was not revealed.

One of the disciples asked him: "Should't a reply be sent granting permission for the marriage?"

"The marriage is already fixed,. Now, where is the necessity for permission?"

"The request is for your blessing?"

"They are there already. Need they be sent?"

The Guru didn't send a reply to the telegram. The news of Aasaan's marriage created a commotion in the Ashram circles, especially among the Sanyasins. But the Swami did

not encourage any display of their disapproval. He asked them;” A person used to eating wheat for forty years has now changed over to rice. So what?”

On this, brother Ayyappan writes thus: “The Swami was much attached to Aasaan even after his marriage. When the Swami called on Asaan at his residence after his marriage. I too had gone there. When Asan’s child was shown to the Swamiji, he made loving enquiries about all details.”

The sudden decision of Aasan, whom he had brought up as his most important disciples, to marry, must certainly have caused disappointment to the Guru. But there is no gainsaying the fact that those who believe that he had displeasure or dislike towards Aasan on that account have not understood the universal compassion of the Guru.

TO THE EAST OF THE SAHYA

The main centre of Sree Narayana Guru’s activity was Kerala. But he had traveled much outside Kerala too and made disciples and followers. The places which enjoyed the benefit of the Swami’s frequent contacts were South Canara, TamilNadu and Ceylon.

Unfortunately we have no descriptive accounts of these journeys. It must be presumed that the journeys might have taken a fairly long time in those days when travel facilities were fewer. It is difficult to describe what a huge loss we have incurred thereby. Alumottil Sri Govindan Channar who followed him on one journey has written thus: “The superhuman powers of the Guru can be known only to those who were with him in his journeys to such places.” Even the few pieces of information we have about some of those journeys bear testimony to the fact that those journeys must certainly have been eventful. Conversations of wisdom, the peculiarities of societies one is confronted with while traveling with a retinue in the traditionally unplanned Sanyasi style, the humility and dispassion the Guru showed while facing them all, the spirituous greatness shining in him at all times and on all occasions- it is accounts of these that we have lost for lack of a reliable recorder of travels.

As already pointed out earlier, after taking Kumaran Aasan to Bangalore in 1895 and entrusting him to Dr. Palpu for higher education, the Swami visited places like Chidambaram, Madhura, Thirunelveli etc., with his retinue. As desired by the Villava devotees of South Canara, he visited Mangalore in 1910 and established the Ceylon for the first time in 1918. Just before that in 1917, owing to the pressing desire of his devotees he visited Madras and spent a few days there. He visited Ceylon as also certain parts of Tamil Nadu for the second time in 1923. The Guru had also toured the districts of Coimbatore and the Nilgiris in 1926.

The Swami greatness had been recognized by all in Tamil Nadu. His disciples had also established at Kancheepuram by a disciple, Swami Govinda, deserves supreme importance. Kancheepuram is the place sanctified by the birth of Sri Ramanujacharya. It is one of the seven holy places of Bharat. Sri Nararaja Guru has recorded a horripolating event narrated by the guru to his disciples while resting there once. The authorities of the famous Vishnu temple at Perambatur had fully understood the greatness of the Guru:-

“They took us inside”, he said, “into the very sanctum sanatorium of the temple. Though very orthodox, they showed no indication of caste prejudice. Full temple honors were bestowed on us and we were received with full ceremonial pomp with all its customary rites”. The Guru seemed touched by the recognitions thus instinctively extended to him by the descendants of the Ramanuja School of wisdom adoration.

“Then”, the Guru continued, “They took us to an ante-room behind the inner shrine where the priests put on their marks of piety or holiness on our forehead.

“We respected their feelings by conforming to this requirement. They were immensely pleased”.

The Swami's eyes were wet with tears when he narrated this recognition of his greatness which transcended all distinctions of caste.

Perhaps the Guru might then have felt unbearable distress in his heart, thinking about the miserable plight of the low caste Hindus including himself.

The orthodox Brahmins led the Swamiji to the Sanctum sanatorium of their most holy temple and adorned his forehead with the sacred mark of Brahmanism. “All are one in the presence of God. There is no caste –distinction among devotees.” Ramanujacharya had declared long ago. They must have detected the same divinity of Ramanujacharya in the Swami, who had come into this world for the same purpose at a time when there was the need to renew the declaration.

The Swami had toured for a day or two in August 1915. He expressed his opinion that the Tamils were really pious and that it would take a long time for the Malayalees to become truly pious.

It was at the invitation of Madras Judges like Mr. Justice Sadasiva Iyer, Mr. Justice Krishnan etc., that the Swami had visited Madras. In the course of that tour, he established the Adwaita Ashrama at Chindripet with the active support of some of his devotees.

The Swami visited the Pazhani temple in Medom (March-April). The Temple Committee had made special arrangements for the visit. They took him to the inner shrines of Lord Subramanian when the arati was on. They garland the Swami with the same garlands the idol was adorned with. The swami talked to the temple authorities about the need for a Sanskrit school at Palani. Muthukurukkal, the Brahmin high-priest of the temple, took

Swami to his house and offered him the traditional seat of honour and made him sit on a cot on which were spread blankets and deerskin. The Swami spent the whole day there accepting the host's generous hospitality.

Later, he left for Tiruchirapalli where he visited the Ucchipillayar temple, that is, the Ganapatytemple situated atop a hill. He returned to Always via Podanur.

When in 1918, he visited Ceylon, he was 64. The Swami preferred to undertake the journey in his usual attire, a white dhoti and a shawl, but his disciples wished that he robes before the Swami when the journey was to begin. Glancing at the clothes, he asked twice: "Should we wear all this?" Nothing that his disciples desired it, with a smile and without demur he wore the ochre clothes for the first time in his life. That was how the Guru became a Sanyasin.

TWO MESSAGES ; TWO CONSECRATIONS

May 15, 1921 was a red-letter day in the history of the Adwaita Ashrama. The annual conference of the Samastha Kerala Sahodara was to be held in Sanskrit School of the Ashramam that day. The news that the Guru also would participate in the meeting instilled much enthusiasm in the office-bearers of the conference and the participants alike.

Young men began arriving at Always in the morning itself by train. Reaching the Ashram, they had a bath in the river. The girl, as usual, had his bath and meditation at dawn itself and was ready to receive people who went to him for a chat or clearing a doubt. He was inspiring with witty talk pregnant with lofty thoughts and enriched by his rich experience. With characteristic simplicity, he asked some young organizers of the Conference "Is there any use conducting huge meeting like this? No constructive work is seen to match the commotion they create. People come in crowds in all apparent seriousness to participate in the meetings. They will speak most vociferously and emotionally. They will proclaim that they are out to improve the whole world! The audience will encourage them with vigorous clapping and nods of assent. During such an harangue when the speaker hears the hoof of the home-bound train he stops abruptly, picks up his wallet and rushes out to catch the train. So end most such meeting. Of course, it doesn't mean that there is absolutely no use holding meeting. It is good to hold meeting occasionally to rouse the conscience of the public."

Sri Nataraja Guru records that the Swami spoke in the same vein to the delegates to the Conference:-

"It is precipitate thought", he went on, "that makes a man try to proclaim his own opinion as the best. No one opinion, however loudly proclaimed, can justly represent whole. It is like the story of the blind men who went to examine the elephant. It is only

waste of breath to argue vociferously to establish any one religion. It is impossible in the nature of things that only one opinion should prevail. Without realizing this simple fact, men divide themselves into rival camps and fight for the mere words that seem to divide them, forgetting the most primary of human interests. Speeches should not be made with a spirit of rivalry or hate. All speech is for knowing and letting others know. A man's religion is matter of his personal conviction, which is bound to be at varying stages of natural evolution in different people. Each man, therefore, may be supposed to belong to a different religion, and no two people belong to the same religion. On the other hand, all the religious of the world agree in spirit, the most essential part of religion. All religions represent values of Truth of Duty. The Goal is common. Why should man fight for his faith?"

The valuable message which the Guru gave on this occasion was one which condemned caste-distinction. He didn't accept the imaginary barriers between man and man. On the contrary he stressed the fundamental unity of mankind. This was the message:-

"Whatever be the religion, dress, languages etc., of man, since their caste is the same, there is no harm in inter-caste marriage and inter-caste dining."

The Swami's birthday was celebrated in the month of September the same year. Two invaluable messages he gave to the world that day. "Liquor is poison. It should not be brewed, served or drunk. The toddy-tapper's body will stink, his dress will stink, and his house home will stink: indeed, whatever he touches will stink." It was a firm declaration against an evil which had been in the vogue for centuries. Not that religious teachers and social reformers had not raised their voice against the sale of liquor or against drinking; The Vedic Rishis, Lord Buddha and others have all opposed drinks. But the Guru's message is founded on a basis different from theirs. This declaration of war in mild language was against the hereditary profession of a good section of the community which had accepted him as its preceptor. He found that liquor was one of the fundamental causes of the deterioration of society. When the Swami incorporated prohibition in his programme of social reform, there was an unprecedented awakening in the entire community. In order to make the community accept this message, a prohibition movement itself was organized under the leadership of Sri T.K. Madhavan with the blessing of Mahatmaji.

All through his life, the Swami attached importance to the propagation of prohibition. Contact with him freed many drunkards from the shackles of that evil habit. Those who desired to give up drinking but had lacked the will. Those who desired to give up drinking but had lacked the will power for it gained strength from the force of the Swami's tender advice. It has also been said that many of those who despised his advice and took to drinking again had various despised his advice and took to drinking again had various discomforts. They too, in the end, had to give up drinking altogether.

Another message that the Swami gave to the world the same day underlines the universality of his views on life. "One caste, one religion, one god for man." This is

contained in his grief work, "Jathi Mimamsa". It contains five verses in the anushtup metre. Its thought- content, its importance etc., are explained elsewhere.

Two consecration ceremonies which took place almost during this period should be mentioned here. The Guru installed two idols, one in 1920, at the Sree Karamukku temple in Trichur district and the other in 1922 at the Sree Kalakanteswara temple at Murukkumpuzha. Both of them are considered a distinct departure from the orthodox tradition. The office-bears of the Karamukku temple had desired that Lord Chidambraranatha should be installed by the Guru. They had also got ready the idol. But at the time of installation, the Guru requested them; "Bring a lamp". It was installed in place of the idol. The Guru performed the consecration ceremony, pronouncing the benediction, "Let there be light."

At the place where the Sree Kalakanteswara temple stands at Murukkumpuzha was a Kali temple. Animal sacrifice, offering of liquor etc., were going on there. It was at that place that the new temple was built and the people of the locality wished to install a sivalinga there. After installing the Sivalinga, the guru simultaneously installed a 'bright radiance on which was written "Satyam, Dharman, Daya, Santhi". The Swami's aim in all this was to lead the human mind from the low symbols to the high.

THE POET AND THE SAINT

It was in 1922 that the meeting between Rabindranath Tagore and the Guru took place. The poet of the India was then on a visit to the South. Tagore had heard a great deal about the guru and his excellent work. Naturally, therefore, he wished to call on the guru during his tour of Travancore.

Both were poets. They met on the Sivagiri Hills at Varkala, which overflowed with nature's beauty. The meeting was mostly in a dumb language for want of a common medium. But it seemed to the separators that the conversation in silence was all the more heart-warming to those great men accustomed to the language of the soul. Thus report an eye witness of that great occasion. "It was a royal reception that the inmates of the Ashram had arranged in honour of the world-poet coming from Bengal. The great poet was led up to the hill-slopes in a procession escorted by caparisoned elephants. The Guru stood in front of the guest house and welcomed the esteemed guest. The costliest carpets were spread on that day. People thronged to see and hear the Guru of Sivagiri and the great poet of Santhinikethan. It took a long time even to maintain discipline. They sat facing each other with folded hands. Tagore it was, who broke the silence. He praised the great work, the Guru was doing. "I have done absolutely nothing so far. Nor I hope I can do anything in future. I really feel sorry for my incapacity," was the Guru's reply! To most of the listeners this sounded enigmatic. Some thought that the

guru was joking; yet a few others tried to seek the logic of those words. Time snailed on in silence. The vast concourse of people stood looking at one another with unmoving eyes, not understanding anything. But the guru's deep eyes full of expressed emotions, seemed eloquent commentary on the language of silence in which he spoke. Everyone merged on that fathomless silence. That was the climax of their dialogue. Thereafter followed formal enquiries about health and other matters. Later, the crowd and the poet departed. The Guru and the silence alone remained." It is almost in this manner that the Guru narrates the scene.

From the few lines that the great poet has recorded about the Guru after his visit, we can see how that embodiment of spiritual splendour captivated the imagination of Tagore.

The poet writes: "I have been touring different parts of the world. During these travels, I have had the good fortune to come into contact with several Saints and Maharshis.

"But I have frankly to admit that I have never come across one who is spiritually grater than the Swami Narayana Guru of Malayalam, nay, a person who is on a par with him in spiritual attainment.

"I am sure, I shall never forget that radiant face illumined by the self- effulgent light of divine glory and those yogic eyes fixing their gaze on a far remote point in the distant horizon.'

TWO IRREPARABLE LOSSES

The year 1924 witnessed two irreparable losses for Kerala. Each of them had a personal bearing on Sree Narayana. The first of these was the tragic end of Mahakavi Kumaran Aasan.

Towards the close of the month of Dhanu, Kumaran Aasan came to Varkala, and remained with the Guru for a long time, conversing on a large no of subjects. In the course of their conversation, the Guru reminded his pupil: "Don't be negligent in the matter of your diet. Take particular care, when you travel." Kumaran Aasan replied, "I am very particular about my food but traveling is unavoidable." The Guru repeated his warning about the need for being careful while traveling. After the conversation, Kumaran Aasan left the Guru for sometime. Finally just before his departure, he wished to take leave of the Swamiji. But by that time, Swamiji had gone for rest. So the poet departed without taking leave of him. At that time, nobody had he least inkling that it was his last journey. On the way to Alleppey from Quilon, the boat "Redeemer" in which he traveled sank at a place called Pallanayar on the night of January 16th and the great poet met with his water grave in that accident. The neglected and the helpless millions of

Kerala, whom the poet immortalized in his deathless works, lost their voice on that tragic night.

On hearing the sad news, the Guru observed fast for the whole day. He did not utter a single word for a long time. He was no doubt a Sanyasin with a steady intellect; but he had a heart full of love and affection. It was shaken to its very bottom. The loss of the boy was too deep for words! Whom he picked up and nurtured with great care, and also rose to rare excellence.

Another irreparable loss the same year was the demise of Sree Chattampi Swamikal who was the Swamiji's brother disciple. It was while traveling in Kurana gapally to raise funds for the Sivagiri School that Sree Narayana Guru heard the news of Sree Chattampi Swamikal's illness. The swami cancelled his programmes and went to see Chattampi Swamikal. The meeting of those two great and intimate souls was indeed unforgettable. It was a moving scene. With touching affection, Sree Narayana took into his own hands, the emaciated palms of his life-long companion, who was also in a sense his Guru. In that position, they sat for long; talking about Chattampi Swamikal's health; but most of the time, they spent in eloquent silence. In the end, as desired by Chattampi Swamikal Sangeeta Swami, who also accompanied Sree Narayana, sang some devotional songs. Chattampi Swamikal, who was himself a reputed musician, kept Tala with his lean fingers. The music over, Sree Narayana took leave and resumed his journey. That was their last meeting. Thus ended a life's companionship of rare intimacy and fruitfulness.

On the 5th of May, 1924, Chattampi Swamikal entered Maha Samadhi, plunging Kerala into intense grief.

PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

Another memorable event of far-reaching significance, which speaks volumes for the swami's vision and far sight, is the conference of religions which was organized at the Alwaye Adwaita Ashramam, in the year 1924. That was, in fact, his message to the world, torn by religious strife. In his own unique and pithy style, he proclaimed to the world, his objective in organizing such a conference. "To know and to make know; not to argue and win". This was the motto which the Guru gave to the conference.

It was Swami Satyavrata who took the lead in organizing the Conference. Sahodharan Ayyappan, C.V. Kurchiraman and T.K. Madhavan put their helping hands to him. Swamiji, who was touring Varkala, reached Alwaye well in time, and made detailed enquiries regarding every arrangements and satisfied himself that everything such as living quarters, dining arrangements have been perfectly done.

The Conference took place on the 3rd and 4th of March. Justice T. Sadasivalyer, of Madras, was the President. Swami took his seat on the dais along with the president. His calm and gentle presence, all observing, but absolutely imperturbed, created a

solemn and serene atmosphere. Others who Ramakrishna Iyer, Mitavadi Krishnan, Rishi Ram, representing the Arya Samaj, a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka, Swami Siva Prasad of Brahmo Samaj, Mohammad MoulaviS, K .k. Kuruvila etc. After receiving the Swami's benediction, the President opened the proceedings. The welcome address was delivered by Swami Satyavrata and vote of thanks proposed by Sri C.V. Kantiraman.

An eye witness account of the Conference describes it thus: - "Well-known scholars of various religious made exquisitely eloquent speeches without showing even the least trace of intolerance of other religious. This programme was a fairly long one. Listening with deep attention the learned speeches delivered by the Swami remained perfectly calm, immersed in silence, absolutely unmoved. Aasan's poetic description of the Guru's presence is indeed very apt.

Watching in indifference! The Wars
 of Religions raging down the ages;
 Hearing reports of ear-splitting, exploding
 Disputes on myth on exploded myth
 And matter for more explosion!
 Unmoving like a mountain, still
 And still serene, profoundly centred
 In the Bliss of thy Being!

The meeting was such a tremendous success that it has remained an annual feature of the Ashram down to this day on every Shivaratri. But, needless to say, no subsequent meeting has so far surpassed the first one blessed by the holy presence of Sree Narayana Guru, nor equaled it.

The main objective of the Swami in holding the Parliament of Religions was to bring home to people the essential unity of all religions. Further, he visualized the establishment of an institution where instruction on the fundamentals of every religion would be given. Elaborating this concept, the Swamiji gave the following message at the conference. "The highest aim of all religions is one and the same. There is no point in the followers of various religions quarrelling among themselves. This has been made very clear in the speeches made during this Parliament of Religions. I, therefore, feel that in the religious school, we intend starting at Sivagiri, facilities for teaching all religions should be made available."

In the year 1925, Mahatma Gandhi paid visit to Sree Narayana Guru. It was on the 12th of March. At that time, Mahatmajiji was touring Travancore, in connection with the Vaikom Satyagraha which was stated by Sri T.K. Madhavan, who was a prominent disciple of the Swami, with the blessings of Mahatmajiji. Vaikom was one of the most sacred Shiva Temples in the South. Ezhavas and other so called non-caste Hindus were not even allowed to walk through the lanes in order to gain the right to walk through those roads. People belonging to all castes participated in the Satyagraha. Blessed by Mahatma Gandhi, the movement soon assumed all-India character and leaders from all over India came to Vaikom to strengthen it. It was in this context that Mahatmajiji himself undertook a tour of Travancore.

“After his interview with the Maharani of Travancore, Mahatmajiji reached the Mutt at 3 P.M. The visit had been arranged at the “Gandhi Ashrama” building belonging to Sri Govinda Das. The pathway from the road to the building had been beautified, laying it with white sand. At the western end of the hall facing east was spread a Khaddar cloth on a Kavalappara mat for Mahatmajiji. A large concourse of people had been standing, line after deep line near the roadside to have a glimpse of Mahatmajiji. Still, tranquility and silence pervaded the entire atmosphere. Mahatmajiji's car reached the road in front of the Gandhi Ashrama exactly at 3.30. The Swamiji came out to the portico of the Ashrama to receive Mahatmajiji. Sri. C. Rajagopalachari walked in front. Behind him came Mahatmajiji smiling, with all the enthusiasm of a youth, wearing his usual attire—just a khaddar cloth round his waist. It was a memorable event for all those who witnessed the meeting of these two extraordinary men. The usual salutations and greeting over, they entered the hall and took their seats. One of the Swamiji's pupils performed ‘Athithipooja’ and prostrated before Mahatmajiji. Then started the conversation.

Since the Mahatma's visit was in connection with the Vaikom Satyagraha and the mobilization of public opinion in favour of it, the conversation was naturally enough, related to it. Mr.Kumaran, an advocate, who later on became a judge, acted as interpreter.

Mahatmajiji : Do you know, Swamiji, whether untouchability is sanctioned in the sacred scriptures of the Hindus?

Swamiji : No.

Mahatmajiji : Do you think, whether something more should be included in that movement or some change effected?

Swamiji : My information is functioning well. I do not think any change is to be made.

Mahatmajiji : In order to get rid of the disabilities of the downtrodden classes, besides eradication of touchability what else, do you think, should be done?

- Swamiji : They should have education and money; inter caste dinners or inter-caste marriages are not absolutely essential. But these people too, like the order, should have all the opportunities for improvement.
- Mahatmaji : Some say that non-violent Sathyagaha is of no use and that for establishment of rights, force alone will do. May I know your opinion?
- Swamiji : I don't think the use of force is good.
- Mahatmaji : Is the use of force sanctioned in the Hindu scriptures.
- Swamiji : It is said in the Puranas that use of force is very necessary for kings and the like and they have used it. But in the case of ordinary people, use of force is not justifiable.
- Mahatmaji : Some say that conversation to other religious is essential and that is the right way of attaining freedom. Do you approve of this?
- Swamiji : Freedom is seen enjoyed by the converts. When we see that, we cannot blame those who say that conversation is good.
- Mahatmaji : Do you think, the Hinduism is enough for providing spiritual salvation?
- Swamiji : Why, there are ways of attaining salvation in other religions also.
- Mahatmaji : Let alone other religions. Are you certain, that Hinduism is enough for the attainment of salvation?
- Swamiji : More than enough. But it is worldly salvation that people are after, in the beginning.
- Mahatmaji : Don't you refer to evil practices like untouchability as a sign of bondage? Don't you think that conversation is essential for spiritual salvation?
- Swamiji : Conversation is unnecessary for spiritual salvation.
- Mahatmaji : We are trying for secular freedom. Will it not materialize?
- Swamiji : It will certainly materialize. However, when one thinks of the deep-rooted nature of the problem, one feels like saying that Mahatmaji will have to come here again for its complete fulfillment.

- Mahatmaji I am confident it will be fulfilled in my lifetime itself. Untouchability is in vogue even among the lowerclass people, have you permitted entry of all people in your temples, Swamiji.
- Swamiji : All are welcome to enter. The boys of the down trodden classes live and learn with in him Sivagiri Mutt. They participate in the worship too.
- Mahatmaji : I am very glad

The conversation covered the subject of Varnashram Dharma also. Gandhiji expressed his view that the existence of various Varnas is a natural phenomena, citing the illustration of big and small leaves in the same tree. The Guru replied that the difference is more apparent than real, because the sap that runs in all is the same. Similarly, he stated, that the human being belonging to apparently different castes, is manifestations of the same reality. Gandhiji was convinced. After the meeting Gandhiji retired to the Vaidika Mutt, where his stay was arranged. He attended the evening worship at the Sarada Temple. He was deeply impressed by the chanting of prayer by the Pulaya boys. He congratulated them for their flawless pronunciation of the Upanishad mantras.

Next day morning the Swami paid his reciprocal visit to Mahatmaji at the Mutt. and the surrounding areas. Mahatmaji spoke with unreserved admiration about the natural beauty of the place and the cleanliness at the surrounding and was full of praise for the greatness of the Swami.

By that time, a large concourse of people had collected at the Ashram, learning about Mahatmaji's presence. Seated on the dais, along with the Swami, Mahatmaji addressed them and exhorted them to take to spinning and weaving. At the end of Gandhiji's speech, the Swami asked the audience to follow Mahatmaji's advice. The Swami accompanied Gandhiji to his car and garlands him, with the words, 'Let us hope to meet many times more'. Thus they parted.

Later, at Trivandrum, Mahatmaji expressed great satisfaction over the talks he had with the Swamiji. He said "I deem it my life's great good fortune to have had the change the 'Dharsan' of Sree Narayana Guru"

What Sri Narayana Guru has written about the Vaikom Satyagraha and about Sree Narayana Guru's approach to it deserved attention in this context." Some of the youth followers of the Guru were impatient for results. It was some time since they had started a movement for the throwing open of Hindu temples to all sections irrespective of caste or birth. They linked their efforts with those of Mahatma Gandhi and the National Congress. They went to see the Mahatma who advised them to try the special method of fighting the situation which he called Satyagraha.

As advised by Mahatmaji, they started a Satyagraha camp at Vaikom. Volunteers came from all over South India. Mahatmaji gave continuous instruction from Ahmedabad. The Guru's land and building at Vaikom were placed at the disposals of the Satyagraha Committee. Most of the

Volunteers and the others involved in the agitation were the Guru's followers. The Guru himself visited the camp in March 1924 and gave encouragement to the Satyarahis. But he did not directly participated in the agitation.

The sathyagraha ended partly fulfilling the people's desire. The Guru established an educational institution for the poor in that place which bore witness to this historically famous agitation. It remains, even today, a memorable monument to the praiseworthy efforts of those enthusiastic youths who came ready to suffer.

There are ample reasons to believe that the Swami was not in complete agreement with the Satyagraha movement started by Mahatmaji. It is true that Swamiji did not in any way discourage the Vaikom Satyagraha. As it took place under the leadership of Sri. T. K. Madhavan, one of his prominent disciples, the Swamiji adopted upto a certain limit, a favorable attitude to it, whatever might have been his personal opinion. But it can't be said that the Swami held the same views as Ganghiji regarding Satyagraha as a means of solving the problem of pollution and untouchability. Sri. Nataraja Guru has recorded thus;

"One tried , as it were , to reach the heart of the masses from the circumstances, with variety as the starting point; while, to the other, the starting-point was the recognition of the one without a second. It was natural that the leader of all—India politics should differ from the solitary Guru in the point of view that he accepted as the basis of activity."

The Guru had feared that the employment of a political weapon like Satyagraha for solving of religion-social problem might produce the opposite effect. The experience he had while visiting Rameswaram immediately following the Vaikom Satyagraha also proved that this was not baseless. A recorded conversation which the guru had with an inmate of the Ashram brings out the Guru's disagreement on many points of the Vaikom Satyagraha in more or less unmistakable term.

Another important visitor to pay homage to the Swami the same year was the famous Swami Shradhananda, the head of the Arya Samaj Gurukula. He was also the President of the All India Suddhi Saba. He was on a tour of the world guiding and inspiring the activities of Arya Samaj. His visit to Kerala was part of this mission.

Arya Samaj had come to Kerala in the wake of the notorious Moplah riots in which thousands of Hindus were forcibly converted into Islam. Most of those unfortunate victims of Muslim fanaticism were later on brought back to the mother faith through the good offices of Arya Samaj. Arya Samaj also fought against many perversions prevalent in the Hindu fold and introduced a strong element of reformism into it. This naturally brought it into confrontation with the orthodox sections among the Hindus, who were intolerant of any move against such obnoxious practices like unsociability and inapproachability. In various parts, it even gave rise to an atmosphere of tension. It was in this context that Swami Shradhananda visited Kerala. There he came face to face with the deep-rooted superstitious and distortions prevalent among the Hindus of Kerala. And in the midst of all these tensions and superstitious he learnt that there emanated from Sivagiri soft and divine voice of true wisdom and harmony in the form of Sree Narayana Guru. He learnt with deep appreciation about the tremendous achievements he had brought out

among the Hindus of Kerala. The appreciation turned in to a strong desire to see him and pay homage to him. Thus he came to Sivagiri.

All arrangements were made to accord a suitable reception to the honourable visitor. The road to the Mutt was beautifully decorated with tender leaves of the coconut tree. Sree Narayana Guru received Swami Shradhanandha with open arms. After the usual exchange of courtesies they settled down to an interesting conversation. Swami Shradhananda paid compliments to the Guru for the great services he had been doing for the enlistment of the depressed section of the Hindus, and acknowledged the fact that the task of Arya Samaj had been considerably lightened by him. The Guru returned the compliment by saying that Arya Samaj is really dear to the hearts of the people who were originally timid and cowardly. Later on they departed, each appreciating the other's activity from the bottom of their hearts.

THE TAMIL NADU-COLOMBO TRIP

Love of travel which the Swami relished since his boyhood days remained with him till the end as an inseparable part of his saintly life. Keeping themselves aloof in some places is not the habit of Sanyasis. The flowing river, the ever-moving air, the traveling planets—these are their examples. Unattached to any particular spot, they move on. This habit guards the 'Sanyasin' in them. It also enables people of various parts to get the benefit of their contact. Speaking about the Mahamas Sri Sankara has said, "Like the spring season, they too move from place to place aiming at the welfare of the world."

Unfortunately, we have no accounts whatever of the Swami's other travels. But in contrast what is narrated below is a journey of which we have got almost detailed descriptions. This narration is in the words of Swami Vidyananda who followed the Swami in this journey. One hopes that this travel account will be of use to the readers in so far as it gives clear picture of the Swami's state of mind at that time, his steadfast, disciplined life as a Sanyasin as well as his readiness even in that old age to boldly face all the weariness and toil consequent on a long journey.

"Soon after his 70th birthday, the Swami started for Ambasamudram from Varkala. It is not clear as to what prompted him to go on this journey. With him was Sangeetha Swami, Hanumangiri Swami, Thiruparamkundram Santhalinga Swami, Sankubhakthan and others. Swami Vidyanandan also joined them six days later. They spent about a week on the bank of the river Tharaparni, whence they went to Thiruparamkundram. The Swami rested for a few days in a lonely forest called Muttayarasu. There are in that place an old temple, good rest houses, a tank, wells and some shady groves. From there it will be about three miles to Madura. From cities like Madura and Virudhunagar many people were aiming to see the Swami. Thanks to the enthusiasm of Hanumangiri Swami and others, all conveniences could be had. The days spent there in the forest were variable festivals due to the presence of the Swami. Fruits and flowers and various other wholesome articles were flowing in from the great city of Madura. The Tamilians were extraordinarily devoted to the Swami. The head of the Brahmanda Swami

Mutt, Swami to their Mutts and took him there. Meanwhile, the Zamindar of Devakkottai, M.L.A., and R. Arunachalam Chettiar invited the Swamiji to his house. This chettiyar was one of his old devotees. At the invitation of the head of the kovilur Mutt, Mahadeva swami gal, the Swami went to his received went to his received lavish hospitality. He rested for a few days by turns at Kannakud, kavilur and devakkottai. A remarkable incident took place during his rest at Kannakudi. From this point onwards, I shall narrate the account of the journey in the words of Swami Vidyananda:-

“The Swami was resting near Melemathom. Near by was a small Ganapathy temple, cared for by none. Turing his eyes to the temple, the Swami was telling some amusing things. That year, owing to the failure of rains, people faced an acute scarcity of water for bathing, drinking etc. and plants wilted. A few prominent devotes of the locality informed the Swami of their misery owing to the lack of rains. He asked them “wig; you offer coconuts to Oillayar if it rains?” “ In plenty” replied all of them. “It began to rain. It poured for the whole day! The people were wonder-stuck. A special pooja for Ganapathy was performed and thousands of coconuts offered to him. From that day onward, pillavar began to receive worship and offerings regularly. The Swami returned to Madrura again on October 10, 1926.the next day he sent for a place called Thirupetkam, 10miles away, situated on the banks of the vaiga. It has legendry fame. Though an old-fashioned village, it is a comfortable place to live in.” Now we need not go to kerala. it is all right if we stay around here. Perhaps some one may come making enquiries about us. Even then we shouldn't go. Who, after all, will come in search of us? Das and a few others might come. But no one is as loving as these Tamillians”. In this vein, the Swami used to speak on many subjects, now in seriousness, now in all good humour. There was a bungalow owned by the zamindar Chettiyar. The Swami arrived there before the appointment time. The Chttiyar's janitor had not arrived yet. The Swami stayed in the house of a Brahmin for the day. The next morning the Swamiji went out for ablutions. I too went with him, taking some water in a Kamandalu. The Swamiji was not keeping fit as he was suffering from gas trouble. He was too weak to walk. Still after covering a distance of about two miles, he decided to bathe in the river. The water was muddy; he ad also not taken tooth cleaners or bathing material. The Swami plucked a piece of peepal root to clean the teeth. I dug a small pit in the river sand. I pailed the cleaner water thus collected with the Kamandalu for the Swami's bath. His robes were soaked too. He had no change of clothes. One he spread doe drying and the other wet garment, he draped around himself. After the bath, the Swami said, “I cannot walk any more. Let me sit somewhere here.” He ambled around a tree a little and sat under it. As there was no one else with us, I couldn't leave the Swami to fetch some clothes or food. Those who had come with us were no houses but only paddy fields nearby. Cholavannan Railway station and town were three miles away. Some time later, our people brought food for the Swami and a sheet to sit on. After eating, the Swami sat there again. Leaving the Swami with Ambassajudram Swaminatha Pillai, We went ahead with our daily routine. I finished my meal quickly and rushed towards where the Swami was. As I was nearing the place running, it began to rain heavily. I had no umbrella with me. Nor were there houses in the neighborhood. Was the Swamiji still there?

Deciding to bring an umbrella after finding out in what condition the Swamiji was, I ran towards the Swamiji only to find him standing drenched and shivering by the side of the tree. Sri Swami Nathan Pillai was standing on the other side. He was

holding in his hands the sheet and the clothes, completely wet. Seeing me drenched too, the Swami said; "Ah! All are wet now! But it does not matter."

"Seeing that there was no sign of the rain abating, I ran for an umbrella. With only river Vaiga on one side, the wide paddy fields on the other and the circuitous road leading to the Cholavannan Railway station in the middle, there was no house or roof shelter. I ran off and returned with a few people. An umbrella and clothes for the Swamiji. The Swamiji was telling many amusing things about the rain. He had no strength to walk; his legs were shivering. Still he began to walk towards the railway station, saying, "I do not feel any strain. What about you? Time, it is difficult to walk." He held the umbrella in his hand and remarked that it was good that the dress was wet. In spite of our insistence, he refused to wear dry clothes. While we were thus walking, there arrived from Thirupetakam some people plying two double bullock-carts, "Carts and cars are no good. This is more comfortable." So saying, the Swamiji walked on. He did not get into the cart. Nor was there any sign of the train ceasing. It lasted for four hours. After traversing some distance, they saw a small 'mandapam'. Many people were sitting there, all unclean- huddled. They were carrying hens with them. The Swamiji climbed up that dirty 'mandapam' and sat there, covering his head with the garment he was wearing. The others stood around. When the rains stopped, he got up and started walking. It was only after our repeated entreaties, that, he got into the cart. The Swamiji immediately jumped down and again walked. There was a short exchange of words between us and the cart men on his account and he was paid the fare dismissed. Reaching the railway station, we knew that there was some more time for the Madurai train to arrive. It was a small station with no convenient place to sit. There was just one bench, which was already occupied by more men than could be accommodated. Persuading them with great difficulty. The Swamiji sat on it. The rains started once again. The Swamiji then got up, walked into the Pillayar temple nearby and sat there. It was not spacious enough even for the Pillayar; There, the Swamiji changed his dress. He criticized his followers, for not finding out some place where they could have some comfortable rest. He was also feeling sorry for the sufferings of Swaminatha Pillar who was drenched all over. He was frequently hearted remarking that "if anyone were to write his life-history, these details should not be ignored." While resting in the Pillayar temple, Hanuman Giri Swami and Sugunananda Giri Swami arrived in a car from Madurai. Though he was requested to go to Madurai by car, he refused. Insisting that he would go only by train, he proceeded to the station. Thinking that we could reach Madurai by car by the time the train reached there, Sri Swaminatha Pillar and myself started. But by the time Swamiji and one of his attendants reached the station, train had already left. The disciples who had gone ahead and got into the train got down at the next station and came back to the Swamiji at Cholavannan station. The Swamiji did not like to go to Madurai that day. They spent on more days at Cholavannan. The next day Swamiji arrived at Madurai by train. He took rest at the bungalow of Sri Muthiah Chettiayar near Theppakkulam. It was a beautiful new bungalow in a lonely place, provided with all amenities. It was only a month since the Governor was given a

banquet there. The Swamiji rested there for six days. Later a few prominent men like Sri George. Sri Thomas and others met the Swamiji in the place of the neighboring Rajah of Ramanathapuram. The Swamiji discussed with them the possibility of starting an institution for women at Madurai. They all agreed to do what was necessary in the matter.

"The Swamiji started from Ramanathapuram to Rameswaram on the third day morning. It was all an unexpected journey. The Swamiji had gone to Ramanathapuram even before. But he never used to make any previous arrangement for his stay there. He was confident of being able to find accommodation in some inn without people coming to know it. The Swamiji's keen desire then was that he should be free from the botheration of Malayalees. There was a bungalow at Rameswaram owned by the Zamindar Chettiar. But when we went there, we were told by Chettiar's steward that the place could not be made available without the landlord's consent. We wired to the Chettair. The Chettiar sent his reply to the steward stating that besides making available the three bungalows for the Swamiji's stay, all the necessary conveniences must be provided for those who were with him during their stay there. But, though everything appeared favorable, we had to face some trouble. News of the Vaikom Satyagraha has reached Rameswaram by that time. Sree Narayana Guru who was not treated formerly as an untouchable, came to be considered one after the Vaikom Satyagraha. When the Swamiji went to Rameswaram earlier, no body thought of him as belonging to an outcaste community. Even the Ezhavas supposed to be of the Swamiji's caste were not regarded as untouchables. Now, we came to know of the Ramanathapuram Collector's warning to the temple authorities: "Narayana Guru of the untouchable caste is coming. Beware of admitting him into the temple and other places." The next day after our arrival at Rameswaram a temple official met Sugunandgiri Swami on the way, harassed him with many questions and warned him not to enter the temple. Hearing this news, Swamiji's heart was very much afflicted. We don't record here the opinions he expressed at that time about the Vaikom Satyagraha. The Swamiji who had desired to spend one or two months at Rameswaram, suddenly changed his mind and decided to leave Rameswaram at once.

"It was then that he thought of going to Colombo. Most of those who were with him were sent away. No one was told of his plan to visit Colombo. Sugunananda Swami and I alone were informed of it. He spent only four days at Rameswaram. On one of those days, we went to the Gandhamandana Mountains. Later, leaving Rameswaram we went to Danuskhoti. The Zamindar's manager had made arrangement for the necessary conveniences there. Still the Swamiji didn't relish the surroundings. Presence of large number of hens and pigs, and also other stinking things made him uncomfortable. Swamiji and the others of his party, had to starve that day, and returned to the 'mandapam' the same night. Swamiji liked the place for its surroundings and free air. We stayed for four days in that secluded but large bungalow belonging to the 'Mandapam Merayakkar'. The Swamiji was all hurry to proceed to Colombo. He sent telegrams to Hanumangiri Swamikal of Madurai and a

few Malayalees at Colombo. The former at once arrived and made all necessary preparations. Govindaanda Swami also came there but had to leave for Kancheepuram. The members of the party procured the necessary health certificate, and started for Colombo on 29th October, 1926. Sugunannada Swami, Hanumangiri Swami, the servant Kumaran and I were the only persons who accompanied Swamiji. Exactly at 7.55 A.M. The next day, we reached the fort station. A large number of people had then thronged to receive the Swamiji at the station. I have accompanied Swamiji to various places. But, nowhere have I witnessed such a large concourse of people. We had not even space enough to stand on the platform. Hindus, Muslim, Christians, Ceylonese, all were there. A big group of Tamilian Nattukutta Chettiyars, another group of Malayalees who had assembled irrespective of caste or region distinction, a few prominent people of Colombo such as H.L.C. Mell, C.M. Cellappa, Imbichi Koya Sahib, Sathyavargeeswarar Iyer, Nalla velu Pillai, Arunachalam Chettiar, Somasundaram Chettiar, Venkitta Chettiar, Chellam Chettiar, Sedaratha muthu krishnan etc, were all there. Most of them were Tamilians. It was they who had made the necessary arrangements for the Swamiji's stay. They received him pompously with multifarious 'vadyas' garland and flowers and various 'vahanas'. The Nattukotta Chettiar had made arrangements to receive the Swamiji with temple honours at Kathiresan Kovil which had been specially decorated for the purpose. The Swamiji rested there for a few days. A more comfortable and spacious place for the Swamiji's rest was difficult to find. In honour of the Swamiji's arrival, the Tamilians arranged daily feasts in cooperation with the Malayalees. The Swamiji rested at Colombo till 21.12.1926. Meanwhile many prominent people called on him. Most of them invited him to their places and extended him every kind of honour. The Swamiji thus visited many places in Colombo. He felt pity for the miserable plight of the Malayalees of Colombo and wanted that their condition should be improved. However nothing worth reporting could be done then. There, the Malayalees were given by partisan strife. The Swamiji tried to bring about harmony among them. Govindandaswami and Nataraja were summoned and directed to put an end to the internecine quarrel. But they Malayalees with contempt.

"Next Swamiji rested in a temple owned by one Lady Arunachalam of Muthuval, the wife of Sir Ram Nathan's brother, Sir Arunachalam. She and her children were sincere devotees of the Swamiji, even before. Swamiji spent a few days in the house of C.M. Challappa, who was an ardent devotee of the Swamiji. Sri D. Mell welcomed the Swamiji to his palatial bungalow specially decorated for the purpose. Buddhists by tradition, they knew well how to honour sanyasins. D. Mell's wife, and children were full of admiration, when they knew that we were pure vegetarians. Accepting the invitations of the Nattukotta Chettiar of Kandi, the Swamiji went there too for a few days' stay. There, he visited some of the important Buddhist institution. But, the Swamiji didn't like their habits. In their Mutts, the Sanyasins used to spit into the spittoons they kept by their side. Their behavior also was devoid of love and affection. However, there were a good many Buddha-Bikshus who showed him great

devotion. At Vallavatha, the Swami orally warded off the evil influence of a devil on a very old Buddha Bikshu of Ceylon. Moreover, he gave initiation to many. A Muslim by name Khader became the Swamiji's disciple and because of his attachment of Hinduism smeared his body with holy ashes and began to call himself KanniSwami. He was quite wealthy. He had a great desire to become one of the Swamiji's monastic disciples. Since the Swamiji's monastic disciples. Since the Swamiji told him that it was too early at that time, he stayed away in Colombo. A European who was a member of the Rosechucian Society approached the Swamiji and requested him to teach him a 'mantra' which he wanted to recite everyday. The European took his wife and children to the Swamiji and made them prostrate before him.

"The Swamiji didn't like to leave Colombo; he even desired to spend his last days in Neuralia or Thriukkonammala. He sent away to Kerala many of those who desired to return. It was only after very great persuasion by a large number of his close devotees that he was finally prevailed upon to return to India.

"The Swamiji left Colombo on 21.12.1926, reaching Madurai on 22.12.1926. Hearing of the Swamiji's arrival at Madurai, Govinda Swami of Varkala, Sankarananda Swami of Alwaye and Parur Kesavan came to thiruparamkundram to meet the Swamiji. It was because of their persistent requests that he started for Varkala. Meanwhile, a few native landlords of Virudhunagar came and invited the Swamiji to their place. The Swamiji desired to go there too. But on account of the pressure of the Varkala people, he dropped that idea. He left Thiruparamkundram on 31.12.1926 and started for Varkala. Reaching there on the morning of 1.1.1927. It was after this that he established the 'Dharma Sanghan' to strengthen the order of his disciples."

THE SWAN SONG

The Guru began to feel that the day for his life's journey to end was not far off. His thoughts now began to centre round the need to evolve a define system, which would smoothly carry forward, even after his death, the activities which he had initiated. He knew very well that the great work of "service to mankind could not be accomplished unless there is a band of Sanyasins dedicated to the cause and so he decided to establish such an order. Like Swami Vivekandha, the Guru too believed in the motto; 'for one's own salvation and for the good of the world' Atmano Mokshartham. Jagat Hithaya Cha. Now that the feeling of his approaching end was growing stronger in him, he began to make preparations for establishing a monastic order.

It was on the 11th of January 1928 that the Guru signed the memorandum and registered the Sangham under the name of "Sree Narayana Dharma Snagham". After nominating Swami Bodhanananda as his successor, the swami made it clear in his will that "after the life-time of Bodhaanada, the fight of succession to these institution and properties will fall on a Sanyasin

elected from among the Santasins of our order and that this right shall continue to be held by the Sishyaparampara'. No harm shall ever come to the sacred ideal of any one of the above mentioned religious and charitable institutions or its permanent maintenance under the administration of any of the Santasins thus elected. In the event of the possibility of any departure from the ideals the above members of the Sangham shall have the full right to control it in a way they deem fit at that time." The great advantage of the of the order of Sanyasins established by the Swami is abundantly clear. It is easier for the Sanyasins, who have renounced everything worldly, to concentrate on religious and social matters. Sanyasins take a vow to do selfless service to the world and so movements meant for the good of the world could very well be entrusted to them. It is evident that the Guru had this idea when he established the Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham.

The Guru was seriously concerned also with the efficient conduct of the S.N.D.P. Yogam. He also paid attention to repairing the loss the organization had suffered in the premature death of his great disciple, Sri Kumaran Aasan,, who conscientiously and successfully shouldered the responsibility of this great organization for a period of about two decades since its inception. At the special conference held in Allelley in December 1927, Sri T.K. Madhavan was elected Secretary of the organization. Another conference was held at Sivagiri in the month of Makaram to discuss organizational matters. The Guru gave the following message to the conference:

"No community will gain strength or achieve prosperity without organization. The 'Yogam' was established twenty five years ago on the basis of his principle. The term 'Ezhava' does not designate a caste or religion. Hence people can be admitted into this organization irrespective of their caste. I wish that many people would join this organization."

In the month of Medom the same year, the Swami was present at the SNDP Yogam held at Panchathukunni and gave a message. Which unequivocally conveys his views on the problem of religious conversation, then raging in Kerala? "It gladdens me very much to know that you think seriously about social organizations and religious conversations. But the aim of organization should not be to form a society uniting people of one community alone. Religious reformation should not end up in renouncing one religious in order to embrace another. Our organization should be one which will unite all men. Religion should permit freedom of faith, be acceptable to the cultured and elevate men to the highest ideal. The 'Sanathana Dharma' "One caste, one religion, one god for man" is such a religion. Uniting those who believe in this Sanathana Dharma seems the best method. For those who believe that the inequalities and difficulties will not vanish without religious conversation, acceptance of Sanatana Dharma as their religion will be tantamount on their religious conversation and declaration of freedom."

There were people who vigorously preached religious conversion. They wanted Ezhavas to embrace Christianity, Buddhism or Islam. This message of the Swamiji did not in any way give encouragement to such people. The essence of the Swamiji's message was that Hindus need not undergo a formal outward conversion into any outside religion.

The very last consecration that Sree Narayana guru made was the Kalavankotam temple. There was a bhabvati temple here at one time, but it dilapidated in course of time. They

desired that a Saktiswara idol should be installed there. They got an idol prepared at a heavy cost. They also fixed 29th June as the auspicious day for the installation. The Swami who had been reverentially invited to conduct the installation. The Swami who had been reverentially invited to conduct the installation ceremony arrived the previous day itself. But he did not perform the ceremony, even though the auspicious hour was over. People felt sad and disappointed. At last, the Swami ordered a mirror to be brought. Immediately the office-bearers went to Ernakulam and brought a big mirror. As much of mercury as would enable one in front of the mirror to read 'Om Santhi' was erased from the mirror. At 4p.m on the night of 31st June, the Swami installed that mirror in the temple. Thus came into existence a unique temple with a unique idol-a mirror with 'Om Shanti' engraved on it.

The last meeting of the SNDP Yogam in which the Swamiji participated was the one held at Kottayam on 14th June, 1928. The Swami himself gave certificates of registration to one hundred and eight branches of the Yogam. That was also the last public function the Swami attended.

MAHASAMADHI

Only the last days of the Guru now remain to be recorded. The life of Sree Narayana Guru, one of the rare Mahatmas who incarnate the divine glory, was moving fast to its finale. Born in Chignoli 1030 under the star 'Chathayam' in the serene and quiet village of Chembazhanthi, he grew into world teacher and his eventful life was now drawing to close with the satisfaction of having fulfilled his mission.

It was a life of hectic activity that knew no rest. Even after attaining the acme of spiritual realization, when he knew that nothing more remains to be attained, the Guru led an active life only for the betterment of the world. True to the tradition of Sanyasins he traveled from place to place without staying anywhere continuously. To the question why he didn't remain calmly settled down somewhere, the Guru replied; "Look there wise. Our don't you see those planets? Don't you see the sun, the moon and the stars? Do they remain stationary? Don't they travel always? They are carrying out their appointed work without rest. We too do likewise. Our Dharma is not to remain in one place but to move on. "Charaivethi Charaivethi".

Sree Sankara taught negation of Kanda. But who, on earth, has led a more vigorously active life? What a wonderful Karma Yogin was Swami Vivekananda who within forty years made a triumphant spiritual tour of the world? The life of the Guru, who belonged to the same order, was also one of restless action; not for himself but for the world; not with any desire but void of it.

It was when he was taking rest at the Vellore Mutt in Vaikom after participating in the annual meeting at Kottayam that the Guru was afflicted with urinary complaint which had often troubled him before. Since the disease took a serious turn, he took complete rest, first, at Alwaye and then at Trichur. The well-known Dr. Krishnan of Palghat took the Swami there.

But there was no improvement. Hearing the news, Dr. Pandelai of Madras came to Palghat. After a preliminary examination, he took the Guru to Madras.

The Swami was staying in the bungalow of the late Dr. Koman. After a few days' treatment, he felt a little relieved. Then he thought that it was better to go back to Palghat to undergo Ayurvedic treatment. He did accordingly and remained there. So he went under expert native treatment for a few days.

Sree Nataraja Guru describes the last days of the Guru thus: - "Towards the end of the year 1927, when his labours had come to a sort of finish, the Guru was definitely unwell. His complaint was old age, which laid its hands, on him. The writer remembers meeting him at Palghat where he was under treatment. There were with him several doctors besides representatives of the various parts of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. The time was early, and the Guru had a bad night's rest. As the writer stood before him, he was resting, seated on his bed and supporting himself erect with his now emaciated arms. His breathing was difficult and he could not speak except in monosyllables. "These", he said, meaning the sounds of his obstructed breathes, "have come as escort". The people came to visit him and expected that, being superhuman as they believed him to be, he would not feel any pain when he was ill. As if to contradict this idea, the crowd of villagers waited outside, they could hear the Guru's voice from inside murmuring like a distressed child, "O Mother! O Mother!" again and again conveying to them, through the tone in which it was uttered, a message that rang in their ears ever after, and containing the same attitude, the same essence of devotion and simplicity to which he had decided the rest of his life."

The Guru was as great an expert in the science of Ayurveda as he was in the arts literature, music, architecture etc. While he was lying ill, used to have a small assembly of physicians belonging to the different systems of meditations. He used to converse with them and arrange impartial discussions on the different systems of medicine. Making himself the subject of the discussion, the Guru used to emphasise the necessity of reviving many forgotten methods in the system of Ayurvedic treatment in the traditional Sanskrit style.

The Guru's fatal illness began to increase inexorably. He was proficient in medical science himself and so when one course of treatment failed, he was able to find out another efficacious one. Bed-ridden and afflicted with illness, the Guru used to conduct arguments with his devotees who looked after him and the doctors who treated him, on very suitable matters connected with his ailment. He was taken from place to place and from doctor to doctor. When it was known that it was all of an avail, the Guru was compelled to go first Palaght in a bedstead and thence to Madras for treatment. Finally he returned to Travancore. By the time he reached the Alwaye railway station, thousands of people who were his disciples and all ignorant of the impending event. However, they were equally afflicted with grief owing to the ailing condition of the Guru who was their comfort and refuge.

The Gurt arrived at Vaikom accompanied by many devotees. While one group of physicians diagnosed the disease as hopeless, another group claimed that it could easily be cured. Sometimes it appeared as if the Guru was all right. No change was ever seen in the

characteristic brightness of his face or the vigour of his soul. Even when he was physically very weak, he showed great reluctance to accept and others help.

With a perfect sense of justice, he participated in the discussion on his own material properties and other litigations and made proper regulations for managing those affairs. Gradually he regained enough health to be shone as the Parama Guru, full of delight and enthusiasm, splendour and compassion.

By the beginning of September 1928 his illness became serious once again. Swami Guru Prasad who was by his side at the time of his Samadhi describes the situation thus: "He had not been able to talk for the last two days. We were all praying to God, Reading the scripture and serving him. By the inevitable decree of destiny, that great light was put out before our eyes. At the Time of the Samadhi, Swami Vidyananda was reading: Jeevan Mukthi Praharanam" in "Yoga vasistham." In the presence of the Swamiji. It was listening to that portion describing the attainment of salvation that the Guru attained Samadhi, rapt in meditation". 28th September 1928 was the day on which he entered Mahasamadhi.

The news of Mahasamadhi spread over the country like wild fire. People were struck with grief. When they realized that the Guru, who had been the centre of their hopes, left them forever, they felt utterly desolate and helpless. The neighborhood of the Ashram was filled with a vast concourse of stunned and sorrow-stricken people, their number swelling every minute. On Friday morning, the Swamiji's dead body, covered with flowers and scents, was placed on a beautiful canopied bedstead and taken to Vanajakshi Mandir. After 6'o Clock in the evening, he was lowered down into cement pit specially prepared in a place on the top of the Sivagiri Hill described by the Swamiji himself on an earlier occasion as an appropriate place for Samadhi. His body up to the neck was covered with camphor, ashes etc,. The pit was covered only on Saturday in deference to the telegraphic requests from many eminent persons. The final covering stone was placed on the Samadhi at the tome of Brahmuhurta.

THE GURU'S WORKS

Sree Narayana Guru was a gifted poet. All spiritual teachers are in truth, poets or artists. Spiritual realization and artistic creation are achievements which depend upon basically similar aptitudes! Therefore critics say that "the wings of religion and art are mutually bound by a long slender thread". That is why all spiritual teachers give expression to their experiences and convey them to the world through poetry, music or other fine for a spiritually realized soul, poetry is almost natural.

It is difficult to claim that all the works of Sree Narayana Guru have come down to us. Forty three pieces have been included in the book "Sree Narayana Deva Krithikal" published by the Sree Naryana Dharma Snagha Trust. It is said that he has written many works besides these and that they are in the private custody of some devotees. Though the number of works listed in the anthology, 'Sree Narayana Guru' by Sri. P. K.Balakrishnan is also 43, they are not

the same pieces included in the above mentioned book. Sree Nataraja Guru, in his book “Word of the Guru” on the other hand, has given the total number of the Guru’s works as 45.

The works are in the three languages, Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit. The largest number is in Malayalam. “Thevattupathikal” is the only known Tamil work.

Sri. N. V Krishna Warriar, a discerning scholar and well known critic has observed that three kinds of compositions can be seen among the Guru’s Works. The first are hymns, composed in Malayalam and Sanskrit. Even in the Malayalam compositions the influence of Tamil can be seen. It is written in an idiom much different from the modern Malayalam literary style. Often they are difficult to follow, unless we read them many times. This influence of Tamil is found not only in the hymns but also in the several doctrinal treatises which he wrote subsequently.

The hymns are mostly to the nature of heart-felt prayers of the devotees in praise of ‘Ishtadevatas’. They are lamentations arising from the heart of a sincere spiritual aspirant. The anguish for liberation from worldly sorrows, the eagerness to attain Sadhana Chathushayam, the four-fold qualifications- these things stand out prominently in them. These hymns disclose the portrait of a tender hearted aspirant.

Some of the features of the old Tamil hymns can be seen in these poems. Verses beginning in the alphabetical order, auster’s adherence to alliteration at the beginning and at the end, poetic commentaries on mantras-all these devices are profusely used. One critic has described this as revealing “the bombastic verbal jugglery of novices among poets,” who, for lack of inner experience attach importance to external ornamentation such as strange word-play and sound-pattern. Another critic explains that these should be considered as the work spiritual disciplines like Mantra, Tantra, Yoga, Hatayoga, Bhaktiyoga, Dhyana etc. Most of the verses are on the deities worshipped, Siva, Subrahmanya. Ganapathy, Devi, Krishna etc. another hymn, praying for rains, which the Swamiji is said to have composed when the people were suffering from drought, is also included here. It is said that this prayer produced an instantaneous down pour. Scholar’s opinion that his works contain mystic poems which reminds one of the deeply significant poems of devotees like Kabir Das.

The hymns are the larger in number. Next come short essays written on individual subjects. Though not very long, they are profoundly thought provoking ‘dissertations; “Chijjatachinthnam”, ‘Jathi Mimamsa’, ‘Daivachinthanam’ etc., belong to his category. They are found written in both Malayalam and Tamil languages.

The works in the third category can be called doctrinal treatises. The writings which deserve the greatest importance for richness of meaning belong to this group. They also are written in Malayalam and Tamil. The Acharya has drawn in them a clear though brief outline of the vision of Vedanta. It can be said that “these treatises to their mystery and subtlety of meaning without entering into arguments, meant to convince the unbeliever. ‘Atmopadesa-satakam’ and ‘Dharsanamala’ are the important pieces in this group, the Former in Malayalam and the latter in Sanskrit ‘Dharmasala’ in Sanskrit is simpler than ‘Armopadesa-satakam’ in Malayalam. This might be because of the unique capacity of Sanskrit language to set down

spiritual matters with effortless ease and clarity. Tamil symbols, styles. Words and methods of compositions have crept into 'Atmopadesa- satakam' in Malayalam in a greater measure. Hence their meaning becomes more evasive; 'Darsanamala' in Sanskrit is direct and easily indelible. In fact, with theses two pieces, the Guru gives Advaita Vedanta in a nutshell to his disciples.

Yet another critic's view is that, considered period-wise the works of he Acharya can be considered as having been written during three periods-the period of spiritual realization. It is also clear that the profundity and grandeur of the writings improve in this order. The earlier division and this can be said to move along the same lines. It seems more or less correct to say that the hymns were written during the penance period and the treatises during the period of spiritual realization.

On reading works of Sree Narayana Guru , there would be few lovers of literature who would not have wished him to have worked in the field of literature instead of having moved towards the spiritual. What a wonderful contribution he would have made to 'Kairali' and Sanskrit! There is absolutely no doubt that the poet in Kumaran Asan was nurtured and nourished by the poet in the Guru. The Guru is a poet of the highest order in the profundity of ideas, felicity of language and the skill in the easy use of simple words and elegant phrases. What a thrill do the very lofty and suitable ideas create as they emerge from his short verses, even in the minds of children! Even as objects are reflected in spotless mirrors profound ideas are transcribed clearly and pleasingly into short little verses and are presented unambiguously by the Guru.

This is not mere poetic skill, but is largely due to his divine inspiration born out of God realization. In fact, he was born the poet and the saint. How eminently illustrative is that short Malayalam piece 'Daivasatakam' it is an 'Upanishad' fit to mould the little children into ardent devotees and men of profound faith. When are these going to be accepted as daily prayers in our national life? These are simple hymns full of poetic excellence, lofty conception and life thought. There can be nothing more befitting for daily prayers to our children than this!

It is said that he has also written a few essays in prose. But they have not seen the light of day. It is high time that a comprehensive anthology of the Guru's work is published. It is believed that several of his disciples have secretly preserved some unpublished works. Most of them call for commentaries. It is certainly comforting to note that competent men have begun to volunteer their service for collecting the Guru's Works and publishing them with adequate commentaries.

THE PROPHET OF RENAISSANCE

It can be seen that Sree Narayana Guru's mission and his message to the world were not fundamentally different from those of the Hindus Sanyasins contemporaneous with him. The difference, if any, was only in the social environments in which they were born, and brought up. The difference in social structures brought about a little difference in the methods of their work

as well as the language they spoke. But there was absolutely no divergence in their aims and ideals. This will be clear when we examine the aims and ideals which directed all their activities.

The Background

The one aim of their life and message was to equip India to face the challenge posed by the western civilization of the nineteenth century. India had successfully faced and overcome several such challenges before. But this new challenge was basically different from all the previous ones. It had the backing of the modern materialistic science with its astounding achievements. Its triumphal march was marked by the conquests of never horizons of achievements and inventions. The British were the representatives of this victorious march and their victory at Plassey was in fact the victory of this march of modern science.

On the other hand, the defeat suffered by India in the battlefields was not merely defeat. It was accepted as a defeat for all that India stood for –her way of life and her culture. It was clash between two conflicting cultures and in that clash, India had to suffer defeat though temporarily.

Two courses of action could follow a defeat of this kind. First, for the conquered nation to stand utterly disarmed before the conquering nation, accepting the latter's superiority and suzerainty. The conquered nation begins to shape itself in the mould of the conqueror, to sacrifice its own national individuality and end up by being transformed into a faded replica of the conquering nation. The second is to take up the challenge once again. It is to realize that the defeat was just a temporary military setback and to be prepared for another confrontation with the conquerors on all fronts. It is to regain the lost freedom and culture through a conflict, however bitter or long it may be and to declare once one's own national individuality.

It was the latter course of action that India had chosen to pursue. The people of Africa, America and Australia, however chose the former. When some of them were wiped out, others tried to appear on the scene in the grab of the old conquerors.

India was able to face the challengers once again because of the dynamism of her soul-her culture, which was based on eternal and imperishable truths. That unique dynamism enabled India not only to face and overcome the several challengers, both material and cultural, down the centuries, but also to absorb and assimilate them. In the nineteenth century too, this dynamism, though dormant was inherently energetic which accounts for India's cultural victory...

The nation had become weak owing to the continuous conflicts and clashes which had taken place during the six or seven centuries preceding the nineteenth. India of the 18th century with her weak and faded national spirit was in a semi-con-scious state-It was during this period that the western powers had come to India, necessitating a fierce clash once over again. No wonder then, that India had to suffer defeat. But there were serious efforts to come out of defeat and even to efface the very sense of defeat and these endeavours were the cause of India's resurrection in the Nineteenth century.

The need of the times was to brighten the faded memory of the people with regard to the deathless soul of India. It was to powerfully rekindle in the hearts of the people those eternal truths which formed the basis of our national life. It was to reinterpret them in a new language suited to the times and to prove that they were quite relevant to the modern times. The Upanishad truths which can be called the spirit of India are to be respected on the basis of experience as valid and meaningful even during the present age of science. It had to be proved that the fundamentals of the Upanishads were not the external forms and frameworks such as class-divisions, caste-system, monarchy and the like, but that they were eternal varieties valid even in the context of the modern age which refused to accept the externals in too. The question was whether it was possible to prove it. Mother India gave birth to several noble sons who could prove it so.

What did India and the world gain by the life and message of such great souls? A few sentences given in the preface to the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda should serve as an answer to this question because this statement is found equally true in the case of all the noble souls contemporaneous with Swami Vivekananda:-

“What Hinduism had heeded, was the organizing and consolidating of its own idea, What the world had needed was a faith that had no fear of truth. Both these are found here. nor could any greater proof have been given of the eternal vigour of the Sanatana Dharma, of the fact that India is as great in the present as ever in the past, than this rise of the individual who, at the critical moment gathers up and voices the communal consciousness’.”

All these can be applied word for word to the life and teaching of Sree Narayana as well.

Prophet of a New Age

So far as Kerala was concerned, Sree Narayana Gurudev Was the Prophet of a new age, not only because he revived and strengthened Hinduism, weakened by superstitions within itself and therefore unable to combat the onslaught from other religions with the elixir of Advaita but also for the reason that he reconstructed society on the firm foundation of pure Advaita.

What is the reason for stating that he was the prophet of a new age with particular reference to Kerala only? Sri Rama Krishna, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Dayanandha were recognized and accepted at the national and even international levels, far beyond the narrow frontiers of their own communities and states. But Sree Narayana's name and fame were confined to Kerala. Even here, he is generally as the spiritual teacher and social reformer of a particular community. And outside Kerala, he is hardly known. What are the reasons for this sorry state?

First, that his area of activity was no doubt limited to the community that stood in the forefront of the lower-castes in Kerala. The Swami himself was a true Sanyasin far above the

considerations of caste. He had no particular attachment to any community except for the fact that he was born in one of them. However, the members of the Ezhava community totally accepted him for the reason that he was born in it. In those days when caste-distinctions were rife, it was very difficult for him to get such whole-hearted recognition from members belonging to the higher castes. It was true that several people belonging to the Nair community treated him with the deepest respect and without any consideration of caste. The relation between Sree Chattambi Swamikal and the Guru was so intimate that they were like two bodies inhabited by a single soul. Moreover, some of the monastic disciples of Sree Narayana Guru were members belonging to higher caste have been reluctant to accept Sree Narayana unreservedly without considerations of caste.

Naturally, the Swami started his work among the community that was willing to respect him and receive his teachings. The fact that his community suffered from several disabilities and that it was a depressed class owing to generations of superstitious and evil practices gave him the impetus to dedicate his services for its uplift. The truth was that sympathy for such a down-trodden people rather than considerations of caste was that impelled him to work among those people.

Another reason for the Swami to remain a stranger outside Kerala is neither so natural nor pardonable. It is man made. A few selfish and narrow-minded people tried to make the Guru their exclusive possession. Their minds were gripped with fear at the thought that they would not be able to exploit the community's sentiments if he were viewed against the vast historical background and placed along with other similar national heroes. It would no longer be possible for them to use the name of the Guru for their own selfish ends once the historic national importance of his life as well as the universality of his message, cutting across all narrow boundaries, was accepted. Therefore, they made attempts to confine the Guru to the four walls of the Ezhava community even as they praised sky-high the quintessence of his sayings, "One caste, one religion, One God for man" and characterized it as unique and universal. The result was that the glory of the Guru, like the lamp imprisoned in a pot, became dim whereas it should have burnt bright across the entire national horizon like that of the other illustrious men of the times.

He Lived Religion

We have already seen that the life's mission of all these illustrious men had been to re-interpret Hinduism in keeping with changing times. It was not merely a verbal interpretation. Religion in Bharat has always been a matter of experience and realization. The authority of the spiritual teacher is his experience and teaching, without experience is but a body sans life. For, skill in interpreting holy Scriptures has never been considered as proof positive of spiritual illumination. All the illustrious men of the nineteenth century who had brought far-reaching changes were men of spiritual realization. There was need for great souls who could live religion and prove its truth by life, for reestablishing faith in the minds of the Hindus at a time the

challengers of the Western material sciences were shaking the very foundations of Hinduism. Sree Narayana guru belonged to such a line of spiritual teachers.

Sree Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Maharshi Dayanand, Aurobindo, Sree Narayana and others had all realized the truths of the Hindu religion in their lives by long and hard tapas. They had transmitted RELIGION onto experience. Of them, Sree Ramakrishna was the embodiment of the harmony of all religious, who practiced all paths and disciplines in his life and found each one of them real, useful and leading to truth. Dayanand's greatness lay in having carried on an uncompromising crusade against what he considered latter-day accretions and corruptions and brought the Vedic religion to its pristine purity. Sree Narayana was the modern spokesman of pure Adwaita. None of them has claimed for himself the authorship of any new religion or philosophy. To a questioner who wanted to know what his religion was, the Guru gave the unequivocal answer, "My religion is Sree Sankara's Adwaita itself". Nor did Sree Sankara fashion a new the religion of the Upanishads. Looking at from this point of view, the religion that Sree Narayana lived and realized by arduous austerities was nothing other than the religion revealed in he Upanishads.

In the Line of the Social Reformer

When we moved from the plane of the spiritual experience to that of social reformers, we again find the same similarity in these illustrious personalities. Sree Ramakrishnan himself did not undertake any social service, his life was the fountain head of sacred inspiration to several Karma Yogins for real social service. The great humanitarian movements started by Swami Vivekananda clearly illustrate this. In fact, it will only be proper to look upon Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as a single entity. If the one is the Mantra, the other is the commentary upon it.

Every one of the social reformers of the nineteenth century had fought against the caste distinctions prevalent in the Hindu society at that time. There was no social reformer or spiritual teacher who had not attacked casteism, child-marriage and polygamy. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's name tops the list among such.

Firmly rooted in the Vedic religion, Swami Dayanand fought against all evil practices such as untouchability. He pronounced the so-called lower classes worthy to receive the sacred Gayatri mantra and the sacred thread. He gave them authority to learn the Vedas. Like Ram Mohan Roy, he too was uncompromising in his stand against idol-worship. In other matters, he attacked the Brahmo-Samaj and called it a new variant of Christianity.

In Maharastra, Mahadeo Govind Ranade and others through Prarthana Samaj carried on a forceful struggle against evil practices. They put forward a strong plea for the remarriage of widows and for the abolition of child-marriage.

Swami Vivekananda condemned caste-distinctions in very harsh term and awakened the people against this evil practice. It was the rampant casteism among the people that prompted Swami Vivekananda to characterize Kerala as a vast 'lunatic asylum'.

Thus the spiritual teachers and social reformers through out India carried a ceaseless crusade against injustices, evil practices and superstitions that were prevalent in the society. In spite of the different methods adapted by them to suit the peculiar problems they had to face in their respective regions, all of them considered it their mission to purify religion and society. They were one in their common objective of preparing Hindus and Hinduism to face the challenges of the times successfully.

It was in Kerala that casteism, untouchability etc., had assumed most horrible proportions. The poison of caste-jealousy and untouchability had permeated everywhere in the social atmosphere. Therefore, Gurudev had to lay emphasis on his activities against casteism as also against out-worn, unhealthy social practices such as 'Pulakuli'. 'Pulikuti' sacrifice and drinking.

Construction not Destruction

The means adopted for the uplift of the lowly and the depressed were also more or less identical. All these great men had alike recognized the necessity and power of education, organization etc. It could be seen that they had devoted the greater part of their efforts towards the realization of these two aims. Raja Ram Mohan Roy started schools where English and modern sciences were taught. He also founded the Brahmo Samaj. Swami Vivekananda proclaimed aloud that a people would rise up only by education. Besides the Ramakrishna Mutt and Mission, he also brought into being several educational institutions. Swamiji Dayanand, the founder of the Arya Samaj equally emphasized the importance of education. He was the inspiration for the establishment of several schools and 'Gurukulams'. Sree Narayana who had apparently no connection with any of them put them same ideas into practice. Gurudev insisted upon both men and women to become educated as he found that no community could rise without education. He started schools at Varkala and Alwaye. Though he paid enough attention to the study of Sanskrit, he did not at all ignore the importance of English. Indeed, he even pointed out that in future, English would be increasingly useful. At one stage, the Guru felt obliged to observe, thus: "It is not temple, but schools that we should hereafter have in greater number". The Swami was convinced also of the inevitability and usefulness of organizations. 'Be strong through organization' was his message to the people. With this objective, he founded the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and Dharma Sangam. He made constant efforts to get hold of people having the required qualification to run those organizations. He found an excellent organizer in the boy 'Kumaran'. He educated the boy and enabled him to hold the reins of the SNDP Yogam. Similarly, he admitted boys into his ashram, educated them and gave directions to the effect that those of them who were worthy and desirous of becoming

Sanyasins might be initiated into the order. These and similar actions of the Swami are proof of his insight and interest in organizational matters.

These noble souls held identical views with regard to the uplift of the lowly and the lost—that it could not be achieved by speeches or agitations. Those who found themselves at the lowest rung of the social ladder owing to historical reasons had to reorganize themselves to acquire culture. Once they became culturally awakened, social progress would follow by itself. “Can anyone treat a person practicing cleanliness as an untouchable and ask him to move away? Even when asked, will he do so? You should practice cleanliness must begin at home, from the kitchen of your home,” –so declared Gurudeva once. Its accent on cultural attainment is obvious.

Their aim was to make the so-called depressed classes were given education and made worthily to receive initiation and the sacred thread. This again was Gurudeva’s aim in asking them to learn Sanskrit and to keep the temples built for their benefit neat and clean. He made them give up the outworn customs and the lower modes of worship. He created among them a strong opinion against evil practices such as polygamy and alcoholism. He saw that their self-respect would increase if they could, like the caste-Hindus, acquire knowledge of Sanskrit. Like Swami Vivekananda, he also believed that ‘in Bharat, knowledge of Sanskrit and respectability are inter-related’. In short, the whole attention of Gurudev was turned to making the entire community culturally conscious and organizationally strong so that they could be able to uplift themselves naturally and with effortless ease.

“Do not create any commotion. It is quit unnecessary”, advised the Swami. This is the sky to an understanding of his philosophy of social reforms. It is commonly understood that social reform means organizing agitations and striving up passions and denouncing adversary in vituperative language. The strength of a social reformer these days is measured by the sharpness with which he condemns others. The attitude of the Swami in this respect was totally different. He believed that far from realizing the objective, harsh language and passion rousing criticism would only help reaction to set in. He gave firm and clear instructions to those who were to speak on religion and social reforms; “Your speeches should, in no circumstances, cause hurt or harm to the so-called depressed classes. Nor should they be in style or tone such as to agitate minds of the so-called higher castes.” There was no instance, during his entire lifetime of an agitated or angry word issuing from his lips. This, of course, does not mean that he did not hold firm views, indeed, he was a master-psychologist whose knowledge of the peculiarities and distinctiveness of men and organizations was profound.’

“Sree Narayana Guru was a unique individual who initiated a great movement without even once in his life- time having spoken a word in an angry agitated tone. He had never expressed his views in our wonted way- attacking or condemning anything. He was able to practice this method not because he had no views of his own or that he did not differ. In the mould of his noble character, disagreement and difference of opinion took the forms of sympathy on the hand and compassion on the other. Indeed, this mental process is too noble for the ordinary to discern”.

To an irate Brahmin who questioned, "Has an Ezhava the scriptural sanction to install the Sivalinga", the Swami's calm but humorous reply was, "The idol I have installed is not a Brahmin Siva, about an Ezhava-Siva. "This shows how the Swami was able to disarm his adversaries and blunt the sharp edge of their attack in his own inimitable way.

His approach to social reforms also was the same. Instead of advising the lower castes to force their entry into the temples of the higher castes, he showed interest in building temples for the former. His aim was to bring about social reforms without quarrels and conflicts. He did not believe in putting down caste distinctions by the use of force. Beyond preaching reforms incessantly and practicing them in his own life scrupulously, "the Swami did not at all point out. Use of force by common people, he told Gandhiji, is positively wrong.

He desired inter-caste dining. But he did not like the idea of the emotionally unwilling people being forced to sit down and eat with other. It is said that the Swami had never forced anybody to do so. Yet even blue-blooded Brahmins without any compulsion other than the serene presence of the Swami had gladly sat with the Harijans for food. The difference was not in the ends but in the means and the Swami's method of approach had only hastened the realization of the objective, and never slackened it.

It can be seen that his approach to social reforms was identical with that of Swami Vivekananda. When we think of Sree Narayana Guru's method of bringing about social reforms, we are reminded of the words addressed by Swami Vivekananda to the modern social reformers who were trying to bring about reforms in society by using harsh language against other.

"This I have to tell the social reformers of Madras that I have the greatest respect and love for them. I love them for their great hearts and their love for country, for the poor, for the oppressed. But I would tell them a brother's love that their method is not right; it has been tried a hundred years and failed. Let us try some new methods."

"Did India ever stand in want of reformers? Do you read the history of India? Who was Ramanuja? Who was Nanak? Who was Chaitanya? Who was Kabir? Who was Dadu? Who were all these great preachers, one following the other, a galaxy of stars of the first magnitude? Did not Ramanuja feel for the lower classes? Did he not try to admit even the parish to his community? Did he not try to admit even Mohammedans to his own fold? Did not Nanak confer with Hindus and Mohammedans, and try to bring about a new state of things? They all tried, and their work is still going on. The difference is this. They had not the fanfaronade of the reformers of today; they had no curses on their lips as modern reformers have; their lips pronounced only blessings. They never condemned. They looked back and said, "O Hindus, what you have done is good, but, my brothers, let us do better." They did not say, "You have been wicked, now let us be good. "They said, "You have been good. But let us be better." That makes a whole world of difference."

The Swami's doctrine, "One caste, One Religion, One God for Men" is justly famous. Its simplicity is indeed astonishing. But it is doubtful whether any other message of his lends itself to such easy 'misunderstanding' and misinterpretation as this. And it is certain that the result of misinterpretation will be dangerous if not suicidal.

The part, "One Religion" is the most difficult, as C.V.Kunhiraman himself has pointed out in one instance. Did the Swami mean that only one Religion need exist? If so, what should be one religion? Was it to be one of the existing religious or an altogether new one? We have to closely study the life and mission of the Swamiji, which alone will provide the key to these and related questions.

First, we have to consider the background of this advice for anything to be fully understood, its study has to be related to the background. The Swami himself threw light on this advice thus: - "What is India's need of the day? Freedom from religious and caste-strife. Let there be an endeavor by all to learn all religions with an equal mind and devotion and then to transmit the knowledge thus acquired, with love and respect for all. It will then be understood that strife is caused not by religion but by egoism. And with understanding will vanish the enthusiasm for proselytisation."

The Swami wanted to do away religious intolerance, for he believed that its cause was not religion, but egoism. Therefore, it is clear that he was not against any religion, but only against intolerance. The Swami proclaimed the doctrine 'One Religion' as a means to remove to remove intolerance which caused religious strife. Now, let enquire into his concept of religion.

The Swami has expressed his view that each individual, according to his temperament and aptitude, has his own particular religion and that there is bound to be shades of differences between the religions of even like-minded individuals. From this point of view, he has stated that there are as many religions as there are individuals.

This does not mean that the Swami rejects the different religions of the day. He admits that each one of these has been formulated by taking into consideration some particular aspect of human nature. And this again is in accordance with the needs of the particular times. At a time when killing was general, Buddhism came into being with its emphasis on non-violence. Similarly, Sree Narayana Guru has pointed out that 'Christianity and Islam gave prominence to love and brotherhood respectively,'

Even when in essence individual has his own religion, we recognize a common religion to a group of people, as Hinduism, Christianity etc. By the same logic, the Swami proved that even when every religion is different from every other there is something basically common in all of them, and so, there is nothing wrong in calling them by a single name on the basis of this commonness. But we must understand that this 'One-religion' is not the negation of the different religions just as the religion of a community or group does not necessarily mean the denial of individual variations.

The Swami himself gives as an illuminating example. Hinduism, as it is commonly called, includes Christianity, Mohammedanism etc., besides Buddhism, Jainism other which are the Vedic religion, the Puranic (ancient) religion, dualism, qualified monism, pure monism, Sankya, Saivism and vaishnavism...By the term Hinduism those are not denied. It is an all inclusive term. This is what the Swami means by one-religion.

Why should 'One-religion' be specially mentioned, when other religions are not to be denied? The answer is: to avoid religious strife, to show that fundamentally there is no difference among them and to convince the people of the basis unity of all religions.

Basically, all religions are one. In so far they lead to same goal, they not ends but means. Religions are the path leading to the goal of God-realisation. From this standpoint it can be seen that they have a common basis, commonness. Let us listen to what the Guru says on this point, "There goal of all religions is the same. Their only function and responsibility is to make the souls upward-looking and introspective. Once that is accomplished, the aspiring souls themselves will find out the ultimate Truth." The Swami thus points out that religious strife are foolish as religions are different paths leading the souls to the same ultimate goal.

To reconcile the apparently dissimilar and conflicting religions on the strength of their common basis has been the Guru's mission. Religions are different because of the differing temperament of their followers which cannot be satisfied by the same religion. Sree Ramakrishna Paramahansa has compared this to the mother serving dishes to the same stuff, but of different tastes to each one of her children, to suit their individual liking. The same path will not be acceptable at once to the intellectual, the emotional and the dynamically active people. Therefore, their religious will be different though their goal is the same. Swami Vivekananda says that there is no conflict even in those apparently conflicting religions. Photographs of the same object taken from various angles and distances might appear inconsistent and contradictory to one another. The contradiction is in the focus perspective and not in the object photographed. Religions are a description of the varied visions of the Absolute Truth comprehended by the many seeks from several viewpoints and relationships. Naturally these can appear dissimilar and conflicting. Nevertheless, it is true beyond the shadow of a doubt that they are basically one, in so far as they are the various aspects of the same Truth.

What the Guru did was to accept all existing religions as path to the same goal and to point out from this viewpoint the oneness of all religions. The readiness to accept and respect all religions in the sense was quite evident in the nineteenth century renaissance of India. As D.S. Sharma writes:-

"All religions have a common basis as they are path leading to the goal of God-realisation. In this sense, they are one. But in their forms and aspects, they are different according to the nature and temperaments of different people. Unity and diversity can be seen co-existing." All that the Guru did by his statement of 'One-religion' was to emphasize this unity and oneness. It is in no way different from the recognition of the Upanishadic principle, ekai sat Vipran bahudha vadanti-Truth is one; the sages call it variously.

By 'One-religion', the Guru has not denied any religion or its usefulness. In fact, he has only emphasized the basic unity of all religions. In deed it was an attempt to unite all warring religions on a common basis without denying the truth of any one of them. As swami Vivekananda once declared "Either all religions must be truth or all of them wrong. No one religion can claim the monopoly of Truth. This was the view of Sree Narayana Guru.

AGAINST RELIGIOUS CONVERSATIONS!

Even when he accepted all religious as true, he resisted all attempts at religious conversations. Nor was that all. He evinced keen interest in reclaiming those who had joined other faiths giving up the Hindu religion. The exodus of Ezhavas to Christianity was arrested to a very great extent when the influence of Sree Narayanan Guru and the organizational strength of the SNDP Yogam became widespread in Travancore. Sree Narayana Guru himself personally reconverted several Ezhavas who were Christian converts and admitted them into the SNDP Yogam.

"Many may not be aware of the fact that some Ezhava families living in the southern and western border areas of Neyyattinkara Taluk, like the Pillais of Jaffna, are in reality Christians though outwardly they appear to be Hindus. It is known that the Ezhava leaders of that area have already begun to keep them out and prevent them from participating in community celebrations and ritualistic ceremonies. The injunction of the Swami in this respect is that other religionists should be excluded from community functions. However, if they give up their new faith in writing they might be permitted to participate in these ceremonies."

Following this injunction, a great many families began to return from Christianity.

"An Ezhava woman was in clandestine relationship with gentlemen of another religion from Thevalakkara. To the question whether it is proper to retain her in the community, the Swami gives the following answer: "If the nature of her clandestine relationship is sufficiently serious according to incontrovertible incidence, then alone, she has to be ostracized According to the nature of her offence, it may be that she can be reprieved after she has gone through the penitential and purifying ceremony. The amount collected as penitence money may be kept as a common fund."

In Cannanore, one Thiryya had embraced Christianity owing to certain domestic problems. In deference to his request, the Swami persuaded the members of his family to accept him back, and he was duly re-admitted into the community.

The Swami personally reclaimed into Hinduism all the Ezhavas who had accepted Christianity en masse and who were living as Christians for centuries, in the area near about Neyyattinkara. He built temples for their worship in the place of churches where they formerly worshipped.

Sri C. Kesavan has clearly noted in his autobiography the grave proselytisation faced by the Hindu Society, and also the real joy with which he welcomed the efforts made by self-respecting Hindus to resist it. Referring to Sri. Kuttath Krishnan Aasan, the Swami once remarked to Sri. C Kesavan, "Don't you know Krishnan? Had it not been for Krishnan, we would all have become Christian. And Hinduism would have been extinct. Don't you see?"

The foregoing remark brings out the Swahili's views on the question of conversation of Hindus to other faiths.

The Swami did not view with favour the efforts made by sections of the community under the leadership of Sri. C. V. Kunhiraman and Sri C. Krishnan, for mass conversion of the Ezhavas, to Buddhism. The booklet, "Mathaparivarthana Rasavadam" published by Kumaran Aasan, repudiating their views by foreful logic, clearly reflects the Guru's own views on the subjects. Pointing out at great length the illogically as well as the impossibility of mass conversion, Kumaran Aasan sets forth his well-thought out opinion as follows: "I have the community in mind when I say that one should not advocate religious conversion light-heartedly as if it were like changing one's clothes. So far the common masses were carrying bricks for the construction of temples. Now, so soon after that, they are asked to carry stones for building Vihars, it will be too much of a burden for those poor men. They will get perplexed. Moreover, I can categorically say that the Swami, who has profound spiritual convictions, will never advocate or tolerate religious conversation, much less do it himself, simply because some of us feel like that. To attempt to convert our own Guru is to say the least, insult to him, I regret to say.

My humble opinion is that it will not benefit us to disown and discard our spiritual preceptor who is the architect of the community's greatness, glory and progress to this day and whom we claim as our proud possession, Now, to run to Ceylon or Tibet, in search of priests is like 'throwing away the gold in hand in order to pick up a piece of brass."

Sri T.K Madhavan also spiritedly attacked the efforts at religious conversation.

Kumaran Aasan and T.K Madhavan were intimate disciples of the Guru. Their views in there matters can be considered as authoritative as his own. The biographer of Sri T.K, Madhavan writes: "Sri Madhavan was a Sanatani Hindu –and his spiritual teacher was Sree Narayana Guru. He used to seek and accept the advice of the Swami in all religious matters. The mahasamadhi of Sree Narayana Guru and the subsequent passing away of T.K.Madhavan were the two events that adversely affected the progress of the Ezhava community. There have taken place considerable changes in the opinion of the Ezhavas regarding religion, nation and communal relations. The present-day move of the Ezhavas for conversion is an instance in point. It is to be seen into what abysas the present day leaders of the community will take the people, if they go on advising their follows to tried their religious faith for within political rights. Those who make a close study of the life of Sri.T.K. Madhavan will be fully convinced that were he alive today he would not have supported or agreed to such movement."

Let us listen to Sri.T.K. Madhavan onwards: "It is our duty to remove the severe inequalities prevalent today, I will work hard for it to the best my ability and will never take up

any suicidal campaign of finding fault with our preceptors, Karma, and re-birth, I am prepaid to lay down my life for the removal of inequality. It is my belief that I will attain salvation by so laying down my life for Dharma and being born again to take up my Karma. This is no superficial or skin-deep but a faith that abides deep in my soul.”

Sri. Murkoothu Kumaran, the noted biographer and one of the noblest disciples of Sree Narayana Guru also held the view that mass conversion of the Ezhavas was not only useless in putting an end to their disabilities but that it would also create more problems. He was pointed out that deviation from the path of progress shown by the Swami, by leader who came after him, was mainly responsible for the decadence of the community. “If casteism were to be abolished in Kerala peacefully and by common consent with out giving room for any agitation and to secure for the depressed classes progress and equal citizenship which they desire and richly deserve even before they desire, the only choice before them is to work along the lines indicated by Sree Narayana.....What is the condition of the community these days when, scoffing at the Swami's directives, many have begun to air their conflicting views-Tall talk about the need for the organization, but in effect, endless squabbles within it”.

AN IDEAL HINDU SANYASIN:

The Swami's life was itself the clearest commentary on his doctrines. As he was an ideal Sanyasin—a Hindu Sanyasin would be the more appropriate word—he loved all religions. He praised penance and religious exercises prescribed by the Hindu tradition. He wrote treatises on the perennial philosophy of the Hindu religion. He built temples and installed in them idols of God and goddesses in keeping with the religious conception of the Hindu. To install even a lighted lamp in lieu of an image is in true Hindu tradition. He strongly discouraged conversions of the Hindus. The Guru taught that each one should practice his own religion with intense faith and then also learn to love and respect other religions. This was his prescription for eradicating religious strifes. It is neither the negation of religion nor the creation of new ones.

Biographers say that he was fond of Islamic religious disciplines. Similarity tolerance was his attitude to Christianity also. This is nothing uncommon among the Hindu saints. We see in the life of Sree Ramakrishna that he realizes God, undergoing religious practices prescribed by every religion. This tolerance and some farsightedness were peculiar features of the Upanishadic religion. Naturally enough, Sree Narayana Guru embodied these virtues.

It will be pertinent here to quote the remarks of Swami Nijananda, the President of the Sivagiri Mutt on the subject. ‘Sree Narayana Guru was the votary of Sanatana Dharma which upholds the supreme authority of the Vedas. It is seen that he respected the Vedas in general and the Upanishads, famed as the direct ‘Sruti’, in particular. It is Sankara's religion of Adwaita that he is seen elaborating in his works such as “Atmopadesa Satak.”

Nataraja Guru, the disciple of Sree Narayana Guru, describes the unique greatness of the latter, in his own style, thus characteristic:

“Once in hundred years, solitary among a hundred thousand there arrives at the caravanserai of life one, at the sight of whose features the seeks instinctively arise from their varied occupations and great him and see in him his ways a clear commentary, a silent interpretation, a radiant centre of all that were seeking. He becomes the object of reverence and common pride. He is able to dispel age-long doubt and darkness by his words: and the hearers smile and for a moment feel a strange happiness. Literature and art and science grow round his person. Historical events find a centre round which to turn.

Narayana Guru was one of such. He was one those who followed in his life the ancient and immoral programmed of oriental saints and prophets. He lefts his home in years, unknown to men, performing Tapas. He emerged from seclusion having solved some great riddle in life and he wanted to give his solution to the world at large. Therefore, without any sort of hesitation whatever, he began to command an influence over rich and poor, educated and uneducated. People flocked to take the dust of his feet.

Today his words are recognized as the most modern echo of the ancient wisdom of the Orient. In him had, combined once again, a bird who sang about the aspirations of the soul of man, a philanthropist whose one aim in life, night and day, was to devise ways to minimize human suffering, and a seer whose daily food and drink was the highest form of Truth. Although out of reach of newspaper men and propagandists this silent sage was the recognized spiritual leader of more than two million people in South India, to whom his word was more imperative than law. Within a period of less than a decade he had established more than one hundred places of worship on the west coast of India alone, which are day by day growing into centers of educational, philanthropic, and economic activity. His message to the people is the subject of weekly comment on many platforms, and scores of associations have been organized in various parts of South India to spread his ideal. By the spell of his name, young and old are seen to join hands in a common undertaking: rich and poor are seen to rub shoulders. It can be asserted that he has set in motion a force which is bounded to spread into a new impetus for the regeneration of India and the world.

SPIRITUAL PRECEPTOR OR SOCIAL REFORMER:

The neo-critics of Sree Narayana Guru who have attempted a critical assessment of the Guru have expressed differing view on his historical role. One controversial topic that has come up is the question whether the Guru was a social reformer or just a spiritual preceptor. Even those who are unable to accept the one aspect the other land themselves on the arguments to which of the two aspects is dominant in his life. This controversy in fact, is irrelevant and pointless. There are those who say that the main objective of the Guru was to introduce social reformers necessary for the removal of castism ,untouchability and inapproachability and that he had accepted the doctrine of Adwaita, which is beyond all ideas of differentiation , only in his

effort to discover a philosophical authority for the realization of the social purpose. In the eyes of others, the Guru was a spiritual preceptor of the Adwaitic persuasion. Social reformation is an imposition on him by some interested individuals as that aspect is foreign to his nature and genius. This controversy, like many others which have come up of late, is most unfortunate, for behind it can be seen the belief that these two aspects are irreconcilable and contrary to each other. It comes from the mistaken notion that a spiritual teacher cannot be a social reformer or vice versa. Most of them are victims of western propaganda, those who blindly believe that the spiritual philosophy of Bharat is the negation of life in this world. But what is the truth?

The Guru was the happy harmony of these two aspects. In his ideal life, spiritual philosophy found an admirable reconciliation with the social reformist Zeal. The one was the complement of the other. No spiritual philosophy can be complete without the concept of social service. Bhagawan Sree Ramam Krishna's advice is to look upon man as the God in him and to serve him as to worship him. This was true spirituality to Sree Rama Krishna.

It was this teaching that took Swami Vivekananda to the path of service to mankind. Spiritual realization reaches its fulfillment in seeing 'Siva' in all 'Jives' and in trying to end their misery and pain. At the same time, spiritualities the true fountain head of inspiration for social reforms. Again, it is from a spiritual philosophy alone that one gets an unfailing true vision of life. It is from the fertile soil of spirituality that one reaps the strength and lofty detachment for fruitful work for which one bends all one's power and faculties without failing or faltering, keeping the mind equable and free from passions such as lust and anger. The Guru who had his feet firmly planted on Adwaitic experience worked unceasingly and energetically to set his community in order without any heat or fury but inspired by love that streamed from the vision of oneness. As such, he demonstrated in his life the astonishing fusion of Karma Yoga and Jana –Yoga.

We can see the same unique characteristic in Sree Sankara as well. He learnt and preached pure Adwaita; but what a life of ceaseless work and action was his. What miracles did he not perform during his life of a bare thirty spring. Travelling throughout the length and breadth of Bharat several times, he laid the firm foundation for a new and dynamic national life by harmonising religious and convincing the warring groups immersed in mutual rivalries and conflicts that they had basic religious unity and oneness.

Similarity unique was the life of Swami Vivekananda. He was no less great as an Adwaitist or Spiritualist. Within forty years of his life, he made a whirlwind tour over the whole world, inspiring the national renaissance movement of Bharat and preparing the ground for the social reforms movement for which he was spiritual motivation. Numerous such illustrations can be given. Enough to say that Sree Narayanan Guru belonged to this order and tradition. He was the spring-head of all awakening and enlightenment in Kerala since his days. The dried-up and dormant springs of dynamism leapt to life at his magic touch. The still and sleeping strength was revived with the result that life at all levels-in art, literature, science, religion, politics and social outlook began to throb with a new vitality. This was how the energy renaissance in Bharat had taken place first a dawn on the spiritual horizon and then its light and warmth illuminating and energizing every aspect of life experience throughout the long history of Bharat. The Guru

added a new chapter to that book of experience. Consequently, one looks upon him as the most modern example of Bharat's eternal energy.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES:

Most of the great souls born in the nineteenth century were the beneficiaries of western education. They benefited from a comparative study of the various religious and cultures, a general knowledge of the progress of science and an intimacy with the thoughts and ideas of the west which influenced western social life. Those sparks of fire born out of the constant clashes of ideas set their thoughts aflame. But the Guru had no such advantages, for he did not receive any English education and so was a stranger to the western thought currents. The limited knowledge gathered from his reading of Sanskrit, Malayalam and Tamil as also his extensive knowledge of the ways of the world was that entire he could lay claim to. But his rational outlook and his powers of observation and enlightenment were such as to compel reverence and admiration from even those who had attained the same due to English education. He had an unusually correct scientific attitude and he learnt religion scientifically which was what distinguished him from the others. The Guru was a classic example to show that a scientific viewpoint was not the gift of western science but one that any person could develop by the proper study of the various branches of knowledge that are traditionally Indian.

Sree Ramakrishna and Maharshi Dayanand, like the Gurudeva, had not acquired any western education. It was the 'vitality of native genius' that manifested itself through those great souls. The facts mentioned above were literally true in their cases. Moreover, the fact that these three noble souls who can be described as the prophets of the three great renaissance movement that originated from Bharat in the nineteenth century strongly and successfully met the defiant western challenge from a purely Indian background declares the deathless dynamism of Indian culture.

Another distinctive feature of the Guru's life was that he was born as the child of a lower-caste community. Nineteenth century had given birth too many others who were born in a depressed community and yet had risen to spiritual fullness and religious leadership. Many great souls and religious teachers were born even in earlier times in lower caste communities. Yet, the Guru who lived in our midst in recent times was a rare phenomenon. Great men are not the monopoly of any caste or community. Looked at from a historical standpoint, however, this distinction is worthy of special mention. It is relevant here to quote a few sentences written by Dr.C.P Ram swami Iyer assessing the importance of the life and teaching of Sree Narayana Guru.

Sree Narayana Guru is a saint in the lineage of seers, whom India was able to produce in times of crisis. He came down to us at a time when the currents of India's life had ceased to flow and became stagnant and polluted. Many parts of our country received the benefits of his blessings. In the lives of such great men, explosive events are naturally rare. Such men do not

exhibit hysterical tendencies in their actions. Till such time as they are capable of rendering service to others, they live their lives in comparative isolation. Such was the life of Sri Narayanan Guru also. He was a realized soul; we know he could also transmit his realization to others. Like Buddha and Ramanuja, he also 'came out'. Out of his inner realization.

His greatest contribution was the message of 'one caste, one religion,' He was born at a time when 'caste' had become so powerful and all pervading that 'man' in men had ceased to exist.

At such a time he dedicated himself to break the barriers of caste and unite the people. He was not an agitational reformer. But his message sank deep into the hearts of the people.

PILOT OF THE SHIP OF CULTURE

Let me conclude this biography with a quotation from Nataraja Guru. From the long-range view of history he describes Sree Narayana Guru's Herculean task of piloting the ship of India's culture which was being buffeted by the waves of foreign onslaughts, thus:

"The touch of the first adventurous mariner on the coast of India marked the beginning of an order of things. From the sea-coast improved cultures of diverse qualities began to be absorbed rapidly. New models of greatness were before the public eye. Moral standards built up in the course of ages crumbled down into ruin, and the masses were face to face with new facts which required revision and readjustment. The rich traditions of old India began to be over covered with the debris of its own greatness.

Saint after saint arose in different parts of India painted by the vision of the beautiful vessel, in which their forefathers withstood the waves, drifting helplessly away from their reach. Some stood on the foreshore imploring heaven; others were overwhelmed with emotion and gave vent to their feelings after the style of tragic heroes. Others went to martyrdom. Few had the courage and the presence of mind to plunge into the waters and do something practical to save the situation. Between the advancing and retreating waves of conflicting influences only a sturdy swimmer could survive. The task was difficult. To light the torch again from the dying embers of past glory pass it on beyond the borders of the new, so that the best of the past could survive in the future this was the primary task the Guru felt called upon to perform"

MODERN REFORMERS AND

SREE NARAYANA GURU

According to some scholars, the modern period in Indian history consists of two phases, one that of reform and the other of renaissance. But this is not to be taken too literally. The division is by no means so rigid or clear-cut. In his book 'Hinduism through the Ages', Prof. D. S.

Sharma states: - "This period may be sub-divided into (1) the age reform movements(1750-1885) and (2) the age of the renaissance (1885-1950A.D very often these two phases tend to overlap and most of the time they flow side by side. But, for the convenience of understanding, such a demarcation is considered useful.

The impact of modern western civilization on the Indian mind was fraught with tremendous potentialities. The immediate effect was similar to the one experienced when a severe blow is dealt to a sleeping person. But soon the shock gave way to a feeling of great admiration for the dazzling, dynamic, western civilization and an attitude of concept and shame for the Indian. But this also was short-lived, and was followed by an interregnum of confused thinking and crude imitation. On the one hand there was great self-pride; love for one's society, culture and tradition. On the other hand, there as a feeling of defeatism and diffidence; admiration for the victor and his ways of life. While manifesting great national self-respect, there was the same time a strong tendency to imintate the foreigner.

Reformers of the early period, no doubt, were men of great intellect, catholic outlook and noble aims, but their approach could not be called wholly and truly Indian. About them Sri Aurobindo said, "They admitted practically,

If not in set opinion, the accidental view of our past culture as only a half-civilization and their governing ideals were borrowed from the West, or at least centrally inspired by the purely western spirit and type of their education." They were proud of Hindu culture and tradition; but at the same time, they were so mesmerized by the glamour of western civilization that in many respects they went to the extent of blindly imitating the West. The criticisms of the Christian missionaries very often found them in the defensive. Consequently they sought to borrow many of the tenets of Christianity and graft them on to their native faith. They often failed to fathom the inner depths of Hindu culture and accepted the ignorant and prejudiced version of Christian missionaries. These reform movements were mostly at the ethical or intellectual level and did not derive their strength and succour from the life-spring of the spirit. Consequently, they did not go deep enough to stir the nation's soul. Their impact though spectacular, was not as lasting as it appeared at the moment.

Still, these reformers and the movements initiated by them played a very useful role in creating the necessary climate for Indian renaissance. These great men introduced a series of reformers in Hindu society, and tried to cast off all the unwanted accretion of the long period of stagnation. They made the society aware of the new forces of dynamic change sweeping across the world and brought home to the people the realization that unless they be stirred themselves and summoned all their inner resources and adjusted their outer behaviour, they would be swept off their feet. Each one of these major or local character played a significant role in preparing Hindu society for struggle, survival and success.

They succeeded in stemming the tide of Western civilization. They put up the rocks of resistance and created the psychological climate for the renaissance that was to follow. These were no mean achievements by any standard, though in terms of positive creativity their contribution was not outstanding.

This phase was accompanied by the period of renaissance described by Sri Aurobindo as the “rebirth of the soul of India into a new body of energy, a new form of its innate and ancient spirit, “Prajna Purani”. This requires a much deeper stir in the inner depths of the nation than had been achieved by the reform movements. Renaissance can arise only when the nation’s soul shines out in all its glory, and set in motion a new impulse of creativity in all the realms of national life. The emergence of spiritual luminaries like Maharsi Dayananda Saraswathi, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Mahayogi Aurobindo and others in quick succession generated this necessary impulse. “These brought about a widespread national awakening-the first important phase, in modern times, of India’s historic evolution towards a greater future. And this phase was characterized not only by the rise of revolutionary nationalism, but by an outburst of creative activities, the first of which are modern India’s imperishable contributions to human civilization.” There was a new throb of life, a new wave of creativity, in all fields of life, literature, art music and even in politics.

Sree Narayana Guru was born at the momentous conjunction of these two currents in national life. Infact, he represented in himself a harmonious blending of those two trends. He combined in himself the spiritual depths of a seer and the passionate zeal of a reformer. Though he embodied in himself all the sanity qualities, he was not oblivious or indifferent to the mundane sufferings of his fellowmen. While his passion for reform was intense, it did not blur his vision based on true spiritual equanimity. A reformer he definitely was; but it was the saint in him that colored his approach to social problems. He was a constructive builder, and not a destructive critic. Zakir Hussain very correctly sized up his role in these pithy words, “He was indeed a practical idealist. By the purity of his living, simplicity of his message and sublimity of his thoughts, he captured the imagination of the people. And wrought a social revolution by consent. After all, a thing endures when there is a real change of heart”.

Swami Ranganathananda, evaluating the role of Sree Narayana Guru as a social reformer, has this to say: “The movement of reform associated with Sree Narayana Guru is unique in one important respect; it is entirely constructive and devoid of any bitterness against the higher classes. It is too eternal glory of Sree Narayana Guru is unique in one important respect; it is entirely constructive and devoid of any bitterness against the higher classes. It is to eternal glory of Sree Narayana Guru to have inaugurated a movement which embodies in itself this unique genius of Hinduism and to have released the forces of the spirit for the solution of the many pressing problems of even the mundane life of the people.”

It is particularly in this respect that Sree Narayana Guru’s contribution stands out from that of other reformers of modern India, living or dead. Few of them had personal experience of the sufferings of the lowly and the lost as the Guru had. He was born among them, he remained one of them. Even after becoming ‘Swami’, he lived and moved with them, feeling their pulse, sharing their woes and experiencing their humiliation. It was not in the form of social change that he was different, but it was in the approach.

There is important difference. As Vivekananda pointed out, “Most of our modern reform movements have been inconsiderate imitations of Western means and methods or works.” Right from the thought level, there has been a good deal of slavishness. Our so-called

intellectuals have been credulously imbibing ideas originating from the West without putting them to searching and critical evolution, and then building up institutions and movements based on those theories. There were reform movements whose ideological inspiration was derived from deliberately distorted notions about the Hindus and their culture propagated by prejudiced westerners. Sree Narayana Guru was absolutely free from such tainting influences. His knowledge about our native culture and life-values was drawn from the unbroken current of our country's tradition as well as from his own sublime spiritualization. Hence, none of his teaching and activities had impress of alien thought.

In fact, Sree Narayana Guru belonged to the illustrious lineage of reformers like Sankara, Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Kabir and Nanak. His method was the same as their and differed sharply from that of the modern reforms. Swami Vivekananda has brought out this important difference in his speech, "My Plan of Campaign". Says he, the difference is this. They had not the fanfaronade of the reformers of today; they had no curses on their lips as modern reformers have; their lips pronounced only blessings. They never condemned. They said to the people that the race must always grow. They looked back and said, "O Hindus, what you have done is good, but my brothers, let us do better." That makes a whole world of difference." Even a causal reading of the life of Sree Narayana Guru will show that the Guru never condemned anyone. He was full of blessings. His approach never created any bitterness or ill-will. But the results were infinitely more successful than the results produced by negative and condemnatory reform movements.

He would not encourage any move which embitter the feelings between the higher and the lower castes. He would only try to soothen them. This explains why there was no outburst of feeling against the Nairs or Brahmins on the lines of the lines of the anti-Brahmin movements of Tamil Nadu or Maharastra. He brought about far-reaching social changes without provoking antagonism from any quarter. Experience has shown that the results so achieved are far more enduring than those produced by negative and condemnatory movements

Both in the methodology as well as the object of his reforms, Sree Narayana Guru's approach was identical to that of our ancient reformers. Their solution of the problem of inequalities was not to bring down the higher, but to raise up the lower up to the level of the higher. As Swami Vivekananda critically puts it, 'The ideal at one end is the Brahmin and the ideal of at the other end is the Chandala and the whole work is to raise the Chandala up to the Brahmin'. When we closely examine the condition of the lower sections of Hindus in Kerala, we find various steps taken by Sree Narayana Guru to uplift them culturally and that this precisely what he did. He sought to uplift their social status and bring them on a par with the higher sections. He made them adopt the forms and contents of worship followed by them; provided them with new temples where such worship could be offered; educated them in Sanskrit as well as in English; taught them the art of cleanliness and made them abjure habits which made them appear low in the eyes of the higher class. Thus through a process of positive upbringing and education, he literally uplifted them and brought them in line with those who treated them as untouchables. He did not rest content with raising the level of the Ezhavas among whom he was born but that of the Nairs too. He was equally keen to uplift the status of Harijans whom the Ezhavas used to treat as inferiors and adopted definite measures towards that end. Thus he

strove ceaselessly to bring up those who were on the lower rungs of society to the level of those who were on the higher rungs, by inculcating in them the necessary qualities and virtues. In this he faithfully continued the tradition set up ancient Hindu reformers.

Sree Narayana Guru's stand on religion and spirituality was unequivocal. Unlike many of the latter-day reformers, he never held religion and spirituality responsible for the evils of Hindu society. On the other hand, he believed that no destruction of religion is necessary to improve the Hindu society, as this state of society exists not on account of religion, but because that religion has not been applied to society as it should have been. 'Hence Sree Narayana did not decry religion. He taught it in its purest form to those who had been denied it. He made them truly religious. He did not also agree with those who thought of disowning Hindu religion and seeking salvation either in Buddhism or Christianity. The Guru advised them to stick to 'Santana Dharma'. If the neo-Buddhist wave that lashed elsewhere did not make any impact on the Ezhavas and other backward sections of the Hindu community of Kerala, it is because the Guru stood rock-like against the conversion attempts.

Another remarkable aspect of Sree Narayana Guru's approach to social problems was that he did believe in imposing reforms from outside. He pleaded, prompted and persuaded. He knew that ultimately the urge should come from within. The way to bring this about was by imparting education. Hence he stressed the importance of education. The two great institutions which the Guru thought fit to raise were temples and schools, one for the spiritual and the other for the material, moral and intellectual upliftment of the down-trodden. He knew that once they are educated, everything else will follow as a matter of course. Time has proved the Guru right. If the Ezhavas of Kerala, who were discriminated against and held down for centuries together today occupy the place of pride in every sphere of life there, the entire credit for this marvelous revolution goes to the unique method adopted by Sree Narayana Guru. Again, if Kerala which had been called a lunatic asylum on account of the practice of extreme untouchability was first to throw open the temples even to the lowest castes by the historic Temples Entry Proclamation of the Travancore Maharajah, it was in no small measure due to the persuasive and pervasive influence of Sree Narayana Guru. Without uttering a harsh word, without setting emotions aflame, without widening the area of differences between communities, he achieved this great success.

Sree Narayana Guru was no superficial reformist. He was one who went to the root of the matter and tried to solve problems in a fundamental manner. He knew that social evils were only manifestations of deeper maladies. You cannot remove them by mere palliatives. Inequalities and injustices arising out of caste and other discriminations can be permanently eliminated only if the sense of equality and brotherhood is established. The question goes much deeper than mere social reforms.

Some of the reformers of modern India who preceded Sree Narayana Guru, as well as those who succeeded him lacked his profound vision and broad perspective and spiritual insight. They did not have this calm detachment arising from his illumined self. They were men in a hurry, impatient. They wanted quick results. In spite of their undoubted sincerity and dedication, their approach was faulty. Instead of solving the problems in an enduring manner,

they produced only transient remedies. In some cases, the problems even accentuated and new conflicts arose. But there were others whose motives were mixed with self-interest. They did not have even the basic qualities to be a social reformer. They had neither sincerity of feeling, nor knowledge of the correct remedy. Their championing of social changes was often prompted by sheer self-aggrandisement. Political adventures found in the prevailing social maladies a handy instrument to achieve their ambitions. The so-called reform movements started by such unscrupulous persons have over the years yielded only bitter fruits-discord, conflict and tension in society.

The lesson is clear. A narrow political approach to solve problems is harmful. Approach at the purely social level will yield only temporary results. It may be like applying balm over a festering wound. The best and most effective remedy lies in the socio-spiritual approach. Awaken the spiritual consciousness of the people, make them realize the essential unity of all beings, and the utter irrationality of customs and beliefs that make unfair discriminations between man and man. That is the way to true equality and social justice. It is this spiritual remedy that Shri Narayana Guru applied, and therein lies the reason of his phenomenal success in social reform. It points the way to those who are battling against the caste and communal evils in the country at large today.

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